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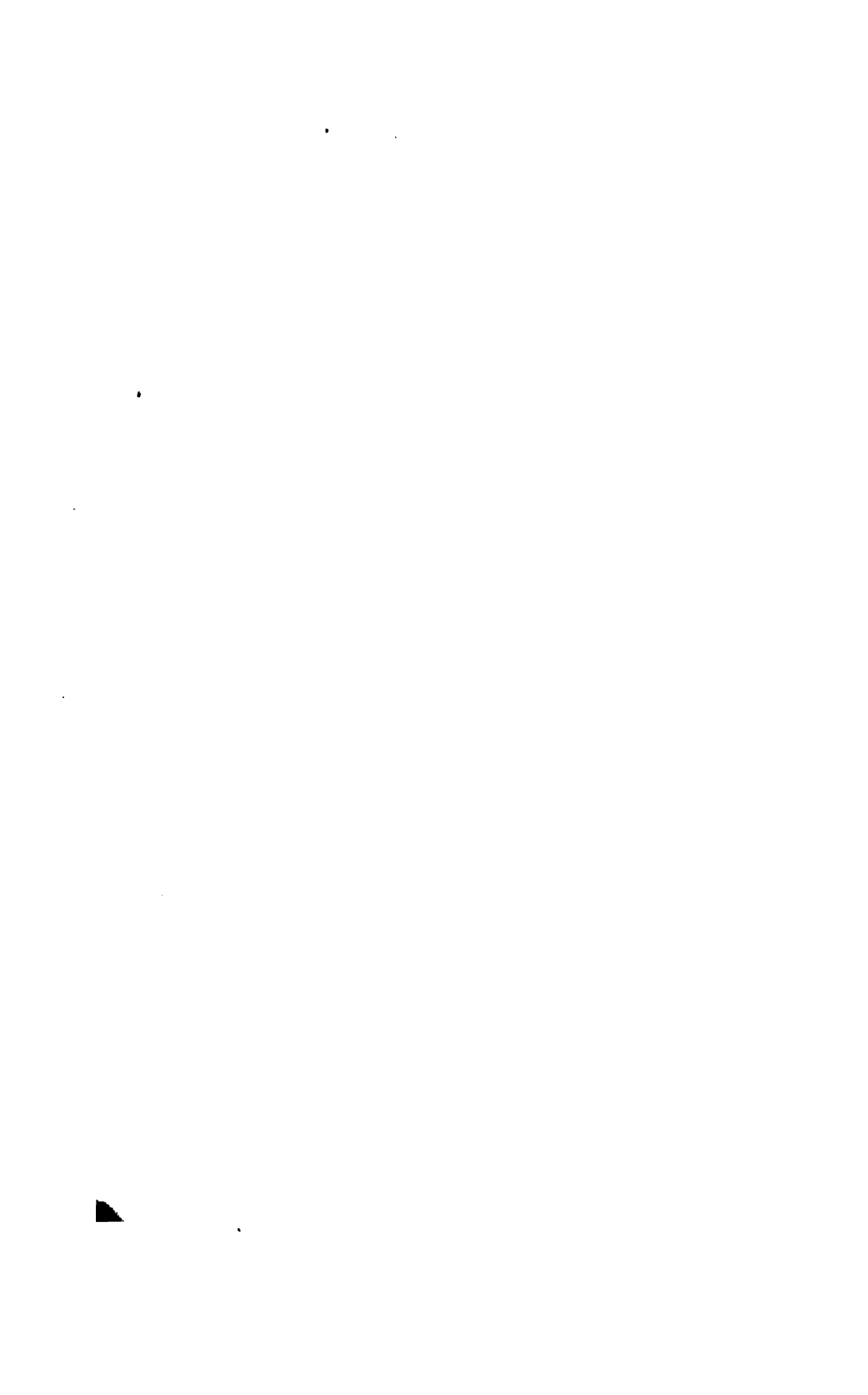
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YOUTH AT THE PROW



YOUTH AT THE PROW

BY

E. RENTOUL ESLER

AUTHOR OF

"A MAID OF THE MANSE," "THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS"

"MID GREEN PASTURES," "THE WARDLAWS"

"THE WAY THEY LOVED AT GRIMPAT"



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Youth at the Prow



A PHILANDERER

CHAPTER I

"LIGHT GREY, seven and a half, ladies' size—for myself," he added explanatorily, for Mr Roderick Weston did not want even the little shop girl at a glove counter to think that his female friends were sufficiently ill-bred to have large extremities.

He was a tall, slim, tintless young man, who carried himself easily and walked well, and on that hot, bright July day he had come down the darkened vista of the best draper's shop in Fordham like embodied youth whose vigour was toned down by becoming languor.

He was not a handsome man, and yet there was something about him that interested the general public more than good looks; not anything indescribable or suggestively mysterious, but rather the absence of certain disagreeable characteristics which very worthy people may possess.

Mr Weston had good manners, and dressed well, and had never been known in all his life to be in a hurry or over-heated, was never

jostled in a crowd, or elbowed at a railway station; had never been found at what he considered a disadvantage. His admirers called him gentlemanly and aristocratic-looking, and wondered how, under the sun, he kept himself always up to the mark; his enemies regarded him as an insufferable cad, and hated him for his perfections.

Although only five-and-twenty at this time, Roderick Weston had been more noticed and criticised and studied than many men of more abundant years and greater social importance. Circumstances had placed him midway between two social sets, and idiosyncrasy led him to make himself observed of both.

Hitherto few persons had come in contact with him without entertaining some feeling towards him, either aversion or approval, and it was characteristic of the man that he would rather have inspired dislike than indifference.

Standing by the Fordham draper's counter, testing the strength and elasticity of the gloves submitted to him, he was perfectly conscious that many pairs of eyes regarded him with interest and admiration, and that the girl serving him was fluttering nervously among the cases she displayed, and blushing as she answered him; not that he was asking anything but ordinary questions regarding shades and sizes; not that he had done more than glance at her once out of his clear, colourless eyes; but somehow Maysie Deane felt that he knew exactly what she looked like, and would recognise her a year thereafter if they met again.

This poor little shop girl, with an innocent, plain face, and a sturdy, solid little figure, waited on men daily that were far handsomer

than Roderick Weston—from her point of view, at any rate—men, too, who seemed to regard her more as a human being, and less as an automaton; but it might have been for that very reason that this man made her feel so hot and flurried.

Maysie Deane was always grateful to people who treated her as if she were a lady; not that she fancied herself one, or ever deluded herself into the comfortable faith that she looked like one. She knew that she was honest, and industrious, and independent, and she was clever enough to know that these are good qualities, and to respect herself on the strength of them; but the affluence, and ease, and elegance, the many friends, the hosts of respectful admirers, the wisdom and wit that Maysie considered the exclusive possession of "born ladies"—these were elements in a world which she dreamed about, but knew nothing of experimentally. Of course Maysie called the other shop girls young ladies, and they called her a young lady, but the word in that sense was merely a conversational counter, which no one mistook for a coin.

Now this man who bought three-buttoned gloves of delicate tint for himself, and who had a long, narrow face, a sallow complexion, and slim hands that surely circulated some paler, cooler fluid than blood beneath the smooth skin—this man, no doubt, lived in the world real ladies inhabited!

She was preparing the stranger's little parcel as she thought this, and involuntarily she sighed. In her own way the girl was very happy, but it was a commonplace, plebeian way, and she knew it.

Meantime, Mr Weston had pocketed his purchases, gathered up his change, lifted his hat to her, and was gone down the golden vista of level light out into the street.

Did Roderick Weston take the girl's sigh as a tribute to his own perfections, and did he bow in answer to it? Not at all. Indeed, it had been quite unheard by him; but lifting his hat in shops where a woman waited on him was a trick acquired abroad, and practised at home because he deemed it becoming.

"A man is no worse man for being a gentleman," he had once answered a friend a little loftily, and certainly it must be admitted that courtesy towards women he carried consistently through all his relations in life.

As he went down the Fordham High Street, glancing at his own reflection now and again in plate-glass windows, a few pedestrians bowed to him, and some ladies in landaus, who did not know him, wondered who he was. Fordham was not the kind of town in which elegant-looking men clothed in light colours were so abundant as to pass unobserved.

It was the day before the opening of the Assizes, and Weston, recently called to the bar, was up at Fordham on business. Not business of any consequence, indeed, rather of horrible insignificance, considering his ability; but still it was business, and, therefore, gave him the right to make himself conspicuous in wig and gown about the court-house, and to pay hurried visits at unconventional hours to all his friends, explaining that his professional duties left him little leisure.

But though his brief did very well for vague display and extensive multiplication before the

uninitiated, Mr Weston realised perfectly how trivial a thing it was, and smarted acutely under the knowledge. With all his ability, and after the distinction of his legal studies, and with a hundred persons prepared to note his progress curiously, it was inexcusable that he had less to do than any blockhead on his circuit.

But, of course, he knew why it was. Like other disappointed people he blunted the arrows of ill-fortune by ascribing them to the hand of malice. The men who could have helped him were jealous of him for one reason or another, or if they were not, they were absurd enough to remember against him that old story of Mrs Castleton.

Mr Weston remembered that story himself, much more vividly than was comfortable, for it involved him in a set of circumstances which, even on his own showing, did not reflect much credit on him. As these circumstances have only an indirect bearing on our story, it will be sufficient to say that Mr Weston, a couple of years before, had permitted himself to be made the catspaw which stirred up to a white heat the fire of a matrimonial quarrel.

Mrs Castleton was a fashionable woman, and Colonel Castleton a jealous husband, and Roderick Weston was an idle young man, quite willing to be petted by a fine lady a good deal his social superior. With these three people located in a quiet neighbourhood, and surrounded by the curious eyes and gossiping tongues peculiar to rural districts, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the Castleton household attained to a good deal of local notoriety.

Roderick Weston meant no harm, he honestly told himself that when the crash came; but it

must be admitted that he was not innocent enough to ignore the fact that he was doing harm. He enjoyed Mrs Castleton's society, he met nicer people at her house than he ever had any chance of encountering elsewhere, and it flattered his vanity to feel that he could hold his own with the best of them. As to Colonel Castleton, he regarded him as a jealous fool, quite unworthy of that magnificent creature, his wife, and it really inflated the young fellow with a fine sense of virtue to multiply towards the lady such delicate attentions as her boor of a husband persistently omitted.

But boors of husbands sometimes object to be instructed in marital deportment by elegant young men of leisure. Colonel Castleton at first treated Roderick Weston with contempt, later with sullen anger, later still with visible indignation that barely tolerated the young man's presence. A man of another mould would not have tolerated it; another type of man might not have found it intolerable. Colonel Castleton did both for many long and tedious months, while Mrs Castleton in her heart was growing tired of her plaything, and wished more than once that he was called to the bar, and so, in a natural way, removed from her neighbourhood. She was tired of Roderick Weston, but unfortunately her husband had tired of him first; and so, one biting November day, the gallant officer ordered his dogcart, buttoned on the long frieze overcoat that covered him to the chin, and drove over to Dean Austin's, twelve miles away.

The Dean was Mrs Castleton's father, a mild, bookish man, with an absent manner and a pale, scholarly face; a man who rarely left his library, into which no echoes from the outer world pene-

trated, and who lived in the comfortable faith that all was peace beyond his ken.

He rose nervously on his son-in-law's appearance; not that he anticipated trouble, but because the Colonel was uncongenial to him, as uncongenial as his dressy, flirting, fashionable daughter had been.

He held out his hand, and the Colonel took it.

"I have no quarrel with you, Dean," he said gravely.

The old man started.

"Quarrel? Of course not! Is anything the matter?"

The Colonel sat down and threw back his overcoat.

"I mean to part from Ada," he said.

"Why?" The Dean pushed back the thin, silver hair from his forehead with a hand that shook a little.

"We have been uncongenial for years, latterly she has grown unendurable. There is a man in the case—a nobody, an idle, empty fellow, such as some women take to; she is linking her name with his, and dragging mine in the mire." He had jerked out his sentences huskily; feeling that he had begun to tremble, he stopped speaking. "I shall make her a liberal allowance," he said after a pause, "and I will take the children. Will you bring her back here?"

"I suppose so." The Dean's thin hands wrung each other, and for a moment Colonel Castleton's heart smote him.

"I am sorry for your sake, and I do not wish to say anything of her but that she has grown intolerable to me."

"And things could not be made right with explanation or apology?" the old man asked in

a low tone. "To spoil your future, and to brand the children—it is a desperate measure, unless there is no other way."

"There is no other, and our lives have been spoiled long ago. We have grown to hate each other."

There was a vibration in his voice that left no mistake as to his sincerity, and the Dean ceased to plead.

The household at the Court was broken up ; Mrs Castleton returned to her father, and Colonel Castleton went abroad and took his children with him. But that had all happened two years ago, and Roderick Weston wondered how people could be so stupid as not to forget.

CHAPTER II

AFTERNOON sunlight was gilding the respectable interior of the Rectory drawing-room at Fordham as Miss Lipsome sat, preoccupiedly, sipping her afternoon tea. She was the rector's sister, a small lady of a certain age, with a round little figure, a sharp little face, restless light blue eyes, and teeth that emphasised themselves a good deal when she talked.

In the opinion of careless observers, Fordham passed for a busy place, peopled to its limits with an industrious population ; judged by the amount of energy Miss Lipsome had directed towards its advancement from the hour of her arrival there, it must have been a somnolent spot, sadly in need of the effort and interest of an energetic lady vested with semi-clerical authority and influence.

No one but herself knew what she had done for Fordham, Miss Lipsome was wont to inform her intimates ; and, honestly believing that she had been a martyr in the cause of her brother's parish, the growing consciousness that the parish was ungrateful hurt her keenly.

Miss Lipsome was moralising over her afternoon tea on general thanklessness, accentuated to her inner consciousness by personal illustrations, when the door opened, and Roderick Weston entered. The Rectory was one of the houses in which this young man had found it advantageous to ensure himself a continual welcome ; it was one of the houses, too, in which it was pleasant to feel himself at home.

It had never been his way to analyse too closely his own motives, and all he would have admitted, even to himself, was that he liked being with the Lipsomes, and that they were fond of him.

In the present instance he turned the drawing-room door handle after the manner of a son of the house who is in a discontented mood, and has no inclination to conceal his feelings.

Miss Lipsome held out her hand, without rising, as he entered ; but she shone all over in the broad smile she gave him.

"Despondent again ?" she asked archly.

"Yes ; quite down on my luck, and leaving Fordham. I have come to say good-bye."

"Is business over ?"

"Yes, and everything else that made the place interesting."

The lady laughed.

"How young you must be to be so impatient ! Have you never heard that all things come round to him who knows how to wait ?"

"I am tired of waiting."

"Is the lady obdurate?"

"The lady is— But let us not talk of it, Miss Lipsome. If there was anything to tell, you should be the first to hear it. I have done my best. I don't think I have omitted anything that might serve me; but there is no progress to record."

Miss Lipsome was in Roderick Weston's confidence, and, except being adored, everyone knows there is no sensation more delightful than being confided in. To the active, garrulous little spinster, her own youth had proved the dreariest portion of her life, and now that it was over, she found more than compensation in being the confessor of a later generation. That Roderick Weston told her what suited himself, and no more, was a fact which, being entirely unsuspected, had never pained her yet.

She looked at him affectionately, as he sat in a despondent attitude; said "Poor boy!" with much feeling, and changed the conversation, hoping he had not come merely for a brief visit, but could place the evening at her disposal. Her brother and she would be dining alone. After dinner she was to meet the choir for a musical rehearsal previous to the harvest festival, and would be so glad of an escort to the school-house and home, as Mr Lipsome would be engaged all the evening.

Mr Weston hesitated, pleaded his morning dress, and the partial necessity he was under of departure from Fordham that night, but finally allowed himself to be overpersuaded, and spent a delightful hour before dinner in conversation of a confidential and personal character.

It was after eight o'clock, and twilight had

long given place to darkness, when Miss Lipsome and her distinguished-looking companion approached the little schoolhouse that adjoined the Fordham parish church.

"How long must I listen to the bawling of your lusty choristers?" Mr Weston asked as they neared the door, with the frank impertinence that often characterised his utterances to his female friends.

"Oh, I don't know; an hour perhaps."

"Or two—more likely two. Now, if I might only smoke outside, watching the stars come out."

"You might catch cold, and injure that voice of yours, on which so much depends. Besides, there is the prettiest girl inside that you ever saw."

"I don't care for pretty girls; I know the type—in her teens, with pink hands and a tendency to giggle."

Mr Weston never missed an occasion of impressing ladies of a certain age with his contempt for youth in the fair sex.

"You are quite mistaken; but if you are going to be disagreeable, you had better go home and leave me to find my way back alone."

"I could make myself exceedingly disagreeable this moment, but not to you; so I shall sacrifice myself."

"That is nice of you; and as a reward you shall see my beauty."

Mr Weston was faintly curious regarding the girl so eulogised; not that he expected her to be in the least after the style he affected. When, after certain preliminaries, and in obedience to Miss Lipsome's summons, a girl's figure detached itself from the group dimly visible at the bottom

of the badly-lighted schoolhouse, and advanced towards the harmonium that stood within the illuminated circle formed by half a dozen oil-lamps, the young man felt his calm pulse quicken by a degree or two.

The girl was young, and tall, and slight, with pale, regular features and clear, dark eyes, and as she came forward, moving slowly, with serene, unconscious grace, Mr Weston uttered to himself the one approving word, "Charming!"

His first observant glance had taken in the quiet tints and trim fit of everything she wore; her first touch on the harmonium convinced him that this girl felt music, and could interpret it.

The practice lasted an hour and a half, but the visitor was not tired. Beautiful things interested him, and the young figure by the harmonium was a revelation. As she sat near him, her delicate profile turned towards him, her small hands moving softly over the keys, her face slightly upturned, as though her dreamy gaze saw mysterious things through the scratched, discoloured wall, the thought of an idealised St Cecilia kept recurring to him. But he manifested no eager interest in her; he scarcely stirred from his first attitude of gentlemanly ease, and only glanced now and then towards her with his clear, observant glance. It was years since Mr Weston had learned that self-restraint is an important item in matters of good breeding, and that indifference, real or feigned, if provoking to the spectator, is eminently becoming to the wearer.

But when the girl rose, he rose too, and remained standing till she joined her friends.

"She is good looking," he said condescendingly, as he sauntered back to the Rectory.

"Good looking! Perfectly beautiful, you mean!" Miss Lipsome interjected warmly.

Mr Weston demurred. Never in his life had this clever young man admitted to a woman that another was unquestionably attractive.

It was ten o'clock now, and a late moon had risen, and was flooding the whole landscape with waves of silver, and every object, stationary or in motion, cast a black shadow like a silhouette on the still street.

Miss Lipsome and her escort were half way home when two girls passed them, walking quickly arm-in-arm. These said Good-night, with sweet, happy young voices, and smiled at the rector's sister as they passed. At a glance Mr Weston saw that they were Miss Lipsome's beauty and his little acquaintance of the glove counter.

"I wonder girls like those have not lovers to see them home," he said, reflecting, after a moment's pause.

Miss Lipsome laughed.

"They hold themselves quite too high for anything of that kind."

"How do those two come to be friends?"

"Friends! They are sisters."

"Really!" Mr Weston was shocked. To have wasted his very best manner on that style of person was at once stupid and provoking.

"Who are they?"

"Church members, a widow's daughters, nice sort of poorish people, have seen better days, and are badly enough off. The mother prides herself on her gentility, and the girls have to work for their bread. One is in a shop in Fordham, the other teaches music, and takes lessons at the same time. I have a kind of idea that she may

be a distinguished performer one day. My brother and I take an interest in them, and help them when we can."

"I don't suppose she will give herself time to become a distinguished performer; a girl like that is sure to marry."

"Well, why not? People have married since the days of Eden."

"And better for them often that they had not," Mr Weston answered, with rather incomprehensible bitterness.

CHAPTER III

"NOT to be relied on, of course; but I might have known—so like a woman." That was the sweeping generalisation into which personal pique swept Mr Roderick Weston, despite his boasted chivalry.

It was a wet October day, and the young gentleman stood, with his hands in his pockets, looking discontentedly from the window of a fashionable hotel on to the beach of a fashionable watering-place.

A watering-place, when the season is quite over, with deserted promenades and a desolate pier, with empty hotels and listless waiters, with notices of apartments to let staring hopelessly from lodging-house windows, and continuous rain dripping drearily from the eaves, is surely the most uninviting resort in the world for a fashionable gentleman who believes in his personal attractions, and conscientiously patronises the best tailor he knows.

There was no man in any of the neighbouring

counties who more frequently paid a flying visit to the desirable watering-place of Riff, in the season, than Mr Roderick Weston, or who more generously displayed his careful toilets to other visitors frequenting the thoroughfares there. But there is a time for all things, and as he looked out on the leaden waves breaking on the rocks beneath his window, and flinging showers of foam high into the air, he felt, with an indignant sense of injury, that autumn was no time for Riff.

"Only a fool would have brought me here at this season," he reflected angrily, forgetting for the moment that the fool in question was the girl he was uncommonly anxious to marry.

He stood for an instant looking out frowningly on the grey lines of sea and sky, then he drew a letter from his pocket and unfolded it slowly. It was written on small-sized note-paper, in a round, girlish hand, and was underlined here and there with dashes that emphasised certain words rather unmeaningly.

"Your letter was at once a pleasure and a pain to me," the girl wrote tremulously, "and I hardly know what to answer. I thought we had agreed to wait in silence till we met again. But if, as you say, silence is breaking your heart, I cannot urge it further. My position is a hard one, loving you and loving my father, and knowing how intensely he will oppose any plan for me but his own. Perhaps if we met and talked our troubles over together they might seem less hard to bear. If I were only quite sure of what is right, I think I should be brave enough to do it. Next week I shall be in the neighbourhood of Riff; a school friend of mine lives there, and if you could manage to be down

at the hotel, so that we could see each other, I think an interview might help me better to understand." The letter stopped here abruptly, and then, as if by an afterthought, the decorous signature of "Ellen Hall" was added hurriedly.

Weston drew a short breath as he refolded the letter.

"It is promising—very promising," he said, smiling a little.

The dining-room behind him seemed less vast and dreary as he turned round from the window; the half-pay officer and retired tobacconist who resided here perennially, and who had been comfortably consuming a cold lunch while he fumed and fasted, seemed less commonplace and uninteresting, and the world outside less wearisome and forbidding.

The clouds had lifted a little, and a blue gleam shone here and there through a watery rift. From the tufts of seaweed adhering to the low rocks, and stirring with the motion of the waves, marine scents were rising, and the sandy soil seemed drying already in the westerly breeze.

Roderick Weston loved nature as little as a man could, but as he went out of doors, unconsciously to himself, the presence of the wide stretch of water fronting him calmed and strengthened him. One of the quick changes peculiar to the coast was already stealing over the earth. Gradually the sea was changing from its grey gloom into an azure field, flecked here and there with a touch of silver, and the mists were lifting themselves like mourning veils from the face of the waters.

He was standing on the headland, listening to the swish of the incoming waves, with his back

to the shore, when a footfall aroused him—a light footfall, moving swiftly.

He turned suddenly, an eager light leaping into his eyes, and a faint flush of colour rising in his sallow face. A girl was approaching him, enveloped in the neat but not very elegant garment known as a lady's ulster, and wearing a gauze veil tied over her face and knotted softly beneath her chin.

The contour of her face, seen dimly, was young, and the locks of hair blowing in little loose rings close to her head were golden. Roderick Weston lifted his hat in his best manner, and stepped forward; but the girl acknowledged his salutation timidly, blushed crimson behind her veil, and hurried on.

"By George!" Mr Weston muttered to himself, confusedly.

It was not Miss Hall, and yet it was someone who knew and recognised him. He followed her slowly, pondering. Who could she be—a young girl, with a round, rosy face, fair hair, and a shy manner? He recalled a score of former acquaintances before he said, half-aloud,—

"The little shop girl!"

He had frightened her, that was evident, for she was hastening forward with the speed of a lapwing, well in view of him still, with a stretch of open country beyond her.

"If she is stopping at one of the farmhouses, I shall see her enter; if at Riff, she must return this way," he reflected, after a little consideration, seating himself at the base of a lichen-covered boulder, prepared to await further developments.

In partial justification of him, it must be remembered that he was absolutely idle, and that

he meditated no plan of action yet, but such as circumstances might suggest to him.

For ten minutes more the girl hurried forward breathlessly, while he watched her with a little amusement. He had lighted a cigarette, and was puffing at it slowly and daintily, noting, as he did so, how the girl slackened her pace by slow degrees, though advancing still, with head well erect, as though listening acutely for any sound of pursuit; how, after a few minutes' slower progress, she stopped, made a feint of gathering something by the wayside, and then looked behind her.

Roderick Weston smiled, showing a gleam of those prominent incisors that made his mouth look sometimes irresolute and sometimes hard.

"She would be angry if I were in sight, and yet she is disappointed that I am not," he thought, as he smoked his cigarette slowly in a delicately appreciative way.

The girl's pace flagged; her walk seemed to have lost its purpose, her gait its energy. She went a few hundred yards farther in a hesitating, aimless kind of way, then turned, and came slowly back towards him and Riff. And as she advanced, with a bright bloom in her cheeks, and the strength given by the winds in the poise of her little person, Roderick was recalling all he could remember about her—the shop at Fordham, Miss Lipsome's singing class, her name, and the beautiful sister.

He had carefully consumed his cigarette to the last fragment before the girl had neared him, or noticed his grey clothing against the lichened rock. When she was within a few yards of him he rose slowly, lifted his hat, and stood bareheaded awaiting her.

"I am afraid I startled you when you saw me first, Miss Deane," he said with a slowness of articulation that unconsciously quieted her; "and I have awaited your return that I may apologise."

"It was nothing—nothing," the girl stammered hurriedly, hoping he did not notice her perturbation.

"I have been making a short stay at Riff on business, and the sight of a familiar face breaking in on my long empty morning delighted me so that I forgot for the moment we had not been introduced," he went on, with an expression of the most candid contrition.

"It was of no consequence, I am sure," poor Maysie answered with a blush, feeling at once terribly disturbed and hugely flattered. "Any friend of Miss Lipsome's would not take a liberty, or mean an offence."

"Of course not; knowing Miss Lipsome is a general certificate of merit. By-the-bye, how did the harvest festival go off? Was the anthem a success?"

He had turned, and was walking beside her, while her head or the universe seemed whirling.

"If I meet Miss Hall, there will be a combination," the young gentleman thought, with a certain satisfaction in the situation.

The Deane girls had come to Riff for a fortnight, so Maysie told him when she had grown a little accustomed to his presence. She had got her holidays, and as her aunt who took lodgers in the summer had rooms to spare, she and her sister had come to the seaside for the rest and pleasure of a complete change. They were fond of Riff—oh, so fond of it!—it did not matter to them that it was empty; solitude was

all the more delightful after the noise and bustle of Fordham.

What did they do all day? Why, little or nothing, for the most part. When it was dry they walked out together; when it was wet they sat by the window and watched the waves breaking on the beach. They both loved the sea, it was so grand at Riff, and they would remember its solemn music, oh, years and years after! They had pretty rooms—so pretty—as good as any on the Parade, and they felt themselves quite grand, just like rich ladies, when they drew down the drawing-room blinds at night, and enjoyed a couple of easy-chairs by the fire. Sometimes their aunt joined them, and she and Maysie sewed while Ida played to them. Ida played quite beautifully, but then Ida did everything well, and looked like a queen always.

At this Roderick Weston glanced towards his companion suspiciously. He had his own standard by which he measured all women; and that standard never reached above the height of jealousy. But the pride which Maysie Deane manifested in her sister seemed quite genuine. Ida was so clever, so beautiful, so good, and so grandly educated, for Ida was going to be a governess.

"All sorts of people are needed in the world," the girl added with a half sigh, as though justifying a latent consciousness of her own inferiority. But of course her affairs could not interest Mr Weston. Maysie apologised for having been so garrulous.

Mr Weston expressed himself deeply interested. He had found himself so very dull at Riff, that the sound of any voice would be

pleasant. How very pleasant, then, the sound of Miss Deane's voice! And the peaceful little picture she had drawn of their home-life on the Parade was so charming, it made him realise all the more keenly the weariness of his own. If only he had known Miss Deane better, he might have asked a friend's privilege of visiting her, but of course that was out of the question.

They had reached the long terrace of bay-windowed houses termed the "Parade" by this time, and had paused by the little iron gate that separated Mrs Hart's two yards of tiled pavement from the street, and Maysie, blushing and excited still, looked up at the lace-curtained windows, then down the desolate terrace, and thence out to sea for inspiration.

To have this distinguished gentleman, Miss Lipsome's friend, visit them, perhaps stay for tea and a chat afterwards, to have a proper bowing acquaintance with him, to see him, perhaps, call at Belvoir Street when they had returned home! The grandeur of these suggestions turned the little creature giddy. But, on the other hand, what would he think of her if she encouraged his advances? How would a lady act under the circumstances, and would he have approached a lady as unceremoniously as he had done her? Of all things, Maysie Deane wanted most to act like a lady, and no joy in the world would have been a joy to her if purchased by an act of conscious vulgarity.

She hesitated a moment, then spoke out honestly, remembering that one stamp of ladyhood is perfect truth.

"I should like you to come and see us, but I don't know if it would be right. We are two

girls, quite by ourselves here, and we don't know you really, not your name even, nor anything about you except that you are Miss Lipsome's friend. As you know the world and we do not, perhaps you had better decide for us."

Roderick Weston was more taken aback than he had felt himself before within his remembrance. To be put on his honour by the simple little girl that he had been comfortably and consciously condescending to staggered him. For the moment he felt tempted to prove himself worthy of her confidence, and to let his prospective diversion go.

"My name is Weston; by profession I am a barrister," he said, quite humbly and apologetically. "If Miss Lipsome were here she would vouch for me; but, since she is not, I feel I should take a liberty in intruding on you."

It was Maysie's duty here to take him at his word and let him leave her, but Maysie was not a heroine, and inclination warred terribly on his side and against decorum.

"As Miss Lipsome's friend, and since we are not at Fordham," she stammered, "if you would care to be introduced to Mrs Hart, my aunt—"

So it was arranged that Mr Weston should present himself at a proper visiting hour in the afternoon to make the acquaintance of Mrs Hart and Ida, her niece.

CHAPTER IV

"DEAR MR WESTON,—We hope to have a few friends here for tea to-morrow evening, and

mother bids me say she would feel much honoured if you would join us. We have invited Mr and Miss Lipsome, and a few other friends. Tea at 6.30.—Sincerely yours,

“MAYSIE DEANE.”

Roderick Weston crumpled the little note, whose perfection had cost the writer an hour's labour, and tossed it carelessly into the empty grate, then he took two or three impatient turns up and down the room, and finally stopped before the window to stare, with his hands in his pockets, unseeing into the street. Mr Weston was beginning to think, and to deem himself foolish for not having thought sooner.

Matters had progressed with surprising rapidity between him and the Deanes since his encounter with Maysie on the headland at Riff; and, as regarded their acquaintance, it is to be feared the girl had precipitated matters by the practice of a little feminine Jesuitry.

“A friend of Miss Lipsome's, from Fordham, who wishes to make your acquaintance,” she said, when announcing his visit to Mrs Hart.

“A friend of Aunt Hart's, from Riff,” she told her mother later; and Mrs Deane, whose gentility was highly delighted by the thought of receiving on an intimate footing such a distinguished personage, became no way aggressive in her investigations.

Of course one of the girls was the attraction that drew this brilliant being to her shabby little house. That with Mrs Deane was a foregone conclusion, and which of them it was—whether shrewd, practical little Maysie, or beautiful Ida—was a question of no great moment to the mother. In her eyes her two daughters were

comfortably unified as "my family," and whatever pleasure or advantage accrued to either was looked upon as a domestic benefit. According to her light and her opportunities, Mrs Deane did her very best for her children. She was poor, and therefore necessity rendered remunerative work incumbent on them meantime; but that they should marry one day, and marry well, was her ultimate ambition. Mrs Deane's own matrimonial relations had been very happy, but even if they had not been, it is doubtful if a woman of her weak character and despondent temperament could have seen any advantage in celibacy for her daughters.

That Mr Weston admired one of her girls had been evident to Mrs Deane from the first; that Mr Weston had serious intentions behind his visits and civilities was a point on which the little woman never permitted herself a doubt. In the world which Mrs Deane inhabited, profitless and purposeless philandering had come little under her observation, and that any man should presume to trifle with her children was a supposition she was too proud to admit. Silly girls might be played with and slighted, but Maysie and Ida had been well brought up. Yet, despite her consciousness of her daughters' merits, Mrs Deane knew that a professional man occupied a better position than they had any right to aspire to. Educated gentlemen were not in the habit of coming a-wooing to Belvoir Street, and that such an honour awaited her family Mrs Deane ascribed in some comfortable and illogical way to her own superiority. Of course a clever man like Roderick Weston had seen at a glance that they were above their present position, and, being what he was, could disregard the dis-

advantages of extraneous circumstances. Mrs Deane was quite sure Mr Weston was superior to the consideration of trifles that might have weighed with other men. Having mentally accepted him as a son-in-law, she proceeded to glorify and love him. As facts did not affect Mrs Deane's estimate of what he was, so probabilities did not hamper her conviction of what he could attain to. A Q.C., a judge, a baron, a Lord Chancellor—there was no limit to the widow's brilliant visions.

As long as things had kept in the monotonous groove of her first years at Fordham, Mrs Deane had been despondent, sighing over past glories, and lamenting that her day was done, but from the hour that Roderick Weston entered her little parlour she put the past aside, and wove herself a gorgeous future.

It was delightful to see the little woman strutting about her daily duties with the dignity of an inflated bantam, and all because a penniless barrister had enrolled himself on her visiting list; but it must be remembered that men of Roderick Weston's education and fine manners had been but little known to Mrs Deane, even in her palmyest days. And to think of him seeking her out now, when she lived in a second-rate house in a fourth-rate street! His finding her there, and valuing her as she deserved, seemed to Mrs Deane the result of combined genius and heroism in him.

Time passes quickly where people are fully occupied. It was now eight months since Mr Weston had met the Deane girls, and in the interim he had been frequently at Fordham, and never without presenting himself at the little house in Belvoir Street. He enjoyed

being there, and the family invariably made him heartily welcome, and, of course, he meant kindly and well; but then it must be remembered that Mr Weston had a dangerous faculty of meaning well in exceptional circumstances.

Lately his easy intercourse with the family had admitted certain elements of discomfort. For one thing, Ida Deane had got a lover, and such a lover as the little widow heartily approved of; for another thing, a crisis in his own history was imminent—a crisis which was certain to alter, not only his relations to the Deanes, but their estimate of him; thirdly, he intensely admired Ida Deane.

It was months now since he had begun to make love to her; not that he would have admitted that expression which, to his delicate perceptions, savoured of vulgarity; and the process, as Roderick Weston translated it, was eminently refined. In some indescribable way he made it patent to the girl that she was very dear to him, and each fresh interview deepened this impression, and yet he had never uttered a word, or done an action that compromised him. In his own eyes, therefore, he had acted well and worthily; but where discomfort touched him was in the certainty, acquired lately, that he wished to compromise himself—wished to know how much Ida Deane cared for him. That she cared somewhat he knew—that she cared a very great deal was a certainty his overweening vanity demanded.

She was the most beautiful, cleverest, most attractive girl he had ever met, but she was immensely his social inferior; yet she eluded, interested, puzzled him, so that he felt now

and then, with an angry self-contempt, that he was beginning to care for her.

And to think that at this very time she had a young, rich, eligible lover, suitable and desirable every way, and quite determined to marry her, if he, Roderick Weston, would permit him.

Mr Weston had not the slightest intention of marrying her himself, but he was as much outraged by Mr Page's effrontery as if he had been his acknowledged rival.

Mr Page was a good-tempered, healthy, high-coloured young man, the junior partner in the business house where Maysie sold gloves—a man of such mercantile ability that those who knew him considered it not unlikely that a few more years might see him, pecuniarily, the equal of Messrs Hewlett and Watson. In the firm he was really the moving spirit, seeing contingencies, and making new departures which the seniors had come to regard with awe and admiration.

Mr Page was not yet quite thirty years of age, and he had entered the firm as the cash-boy, who carried change to the different counters, so that he had very good reason to have meantime acquired faith in himself and in his future. Mr Page meant to rise as high as the limits of the retail drapery business permitted. So much for the dictates of his head. Mr Page also meant to marry Ida Deane, if earnestness and assiduity could effect that result.

That this ruddy, robust young man was vulgar and commonplace beyond words in the estimation of Roderick Weston it is needless to state; certainly, contrasted with the barrister's complex calculations, his rule of life was very

simple. Mr Page meant to marry for affection, and work for success, and Mr Page had fallen in love with Ida Deane's beautiful face in the most homely, old-fashioned way. Having seen her he got to know her, made a vague excuse for calling at the house, and once there, had so ingratiated himself as to secure a welcome for his future visits.

Mrs Deane was enchanted by his assiduities; her little figure seemed two inches taller from the dignity with which she bore herself, and, without any consciousness in her of the fact, she became ten times more detestable to her immediate neighbours. At this period several of Mrs Deane's female friends would have given a tenth of their income for a satisfactory opportunity of giving her a piece of their minds.

Ida to marry Mr Page, and Maysie Mr Weston—the prospect dazzled the little woman. From the first there had been no doubt at whose shrine the draper worshipped, but about Mr Weston's attentions there had been an elegant indefiniteness that left all but Ida in uncertainty as to his feelings; therefore, when subsequent circumstances rendered it expedient, Mrs Deane allotted him to Maysie comfortably and with a sense of fairness.

Things were in this condition when an old friend of Mrs Deane's came to stop a few days in Belvoir Street, and Mrs Deane rose to the occasion. To convince this lady, a school inspector's widow, and genteelly connected, that though she had fallen pecuniarily she had not fallen socially, Mrs Deane determined to give a party. With the rector and his sister, Mr Weston and Mr Page, and a girl or two to help in the musical part of the evening's

entertainment, Mrs Deane felt that she would have company as select as anyone, and then it was possible that a little sociality might help the progress of events.

All the guests had arrived, with the exception of Mr and Miss Lipsome, who pleaded a pre-engagement, when Roderick Weston, in evening dress, turned the door handle of the little parlour, and entered.

To be the one person in evening dress in an assembly of your superiors is maddening; to be the one person in evening dress among your inferiors gives you an indescribable flavour of elegance and superiority. Mr Page had scarcely caught a glimpse of the white tie and dress coat of his rival before he became overwhelmingly conscious of the utter vulgarity and unbecomingness of his morning attire.

He had been sitting on the sofa in the happiest frame of mind before the barrister's entrance, with Maysie beside him, prattling to him with entertaining reverence, and Ida opposite him, in the recess of the window, ostentatiously disregarding him.

The latter looked her best; she wore a dress of thin black stuff that showed outlines of perfect arms and shoulders through its tissue. Her dark hair was swept into a soft coil on the nape of her slender neck, and drawn back from the temples with a severity that would have been trying to any face less perfect. For ornament, she wore a cluster of syringa blossoms on her breast.

Maysie was in black silk, by reason of her more prosperous circumstances, and looked really pretty with a wild-rose bloom in her cheeks, and her eyes soft and lustrous with pleasure and excitement.

Her feeling towards Mr Page was the oddest mingling of reverence, gratitude and affection—reverence because he was the head of her establishment; gratitude because he seemed to presuppose perfect equality with all her family; affection because he was sure to be her brother-in-law.

Maysie stole a glance at her sister as she thought this, and sighed. Ida did not share her admiration for the junior partner, or, if she did, concealed it skilfully. More than once Maysie had heard her speak of him as "fat Mr Page," and everyone knows that a consciousness of adipose tissue is entirely detrimental to the softer sentiments. But probably Ida did not yet realise that he loved her.

As this supposition presented itself, Maysie experienced a little thrill of self-approval. In a general way she did not think herself cleverer than her sister, but certainly she had been quicker to interpret Mr Page.

But might it not be that Ida understood Mr Weston as she understood his rival? The girl sighed faintly as she asked herself this. There had been a time when she believed she had understood Mr Weston, a time when she fancied he cared for her, but that had been before Mr Page's ardour towards her sister had enforced the contrast in Mr Weston's bearing towards herself.

That he was indifferent to her she was beginning to fear; that he cared for Ida had never yet occurred to her. It was not Mr Weston's way to make his attentions palpable to outsiders, unless by design, and it was she whom he remembered at Riff; she whom he sought to know afterwards; she to whom he was always compli-

mentary when they met. But perhaps it was the way of people in Mr Weston's world to be very attentive and mean nothing.

Occasionally Maysie admitted this possibility to herself with tears, even while determining heroically not to break her heart, if he proved a deceiver. At this period it must be reluctantly confessed that Roderick Weston could have had the devotion of several fine girls for the asking.

CHAPTER V

"Do you mean to marry that fellow?"

The barrister's voice was a little rough and shaken as he put the question.

The evening at Mrs Deane's was over—an evening that had been both wearisome and irritating to him. To talk platitudes with Mrs Deane and the school inspector's widow, to raise his voice in most unwilling thanks for the imperfect music of Maysie Dean and her girlfriends, and to see the one person who interested him monopolised by a plump, pink young draper, was maddening; and what irritated him still more was the knowledge that his vexation manifested itself. To be wroth under the circumstances was bad enough; to have his discomfiture evident to these people was intolerable.

"But I deserve no better, when I have identified myself with a silly, vain old woman and her underbred daughters," he said to himself, with angrily sparkling eyes.

It may be remembered that it was not Mr

Weston's way to be any too complimentary towards people who disappointed him.

He was tempted to withdraw half a dozen times before the evening was over, but something within himself restrained him. Not, of course, that he was jealous of Mr Page, or cared how Ida Deane bore herself, but that he was minded, since he was in the thing, to see it out; so he lingered through the unsatisfactory music and idiotic games, swallowed his portion of the light little supper, and even forced himself to accept the proffered hand of the roseate draper, who took leave of him and all the remainder of the company in high good humour. Mr Page was seeing some of the girl guests home, and the school inspector's widow was remaining over night; therefore Roderick Weston was the last to leave.

"I shall see you to the door," Ida said, with the pretty audacity that had characterised her all that evening.

He did not answer her, indeed, scarcely seemed to notice her, till he stood on the doorstep; then he put his question abruptly,—

"Do you mean to marry that fellow?"

"What fellow?"

She stood above him, bathed in moonlight, with the syringa blossoms gleaming like white stars on her breast.

"The draper."

She looked at him with a whole world of meaning in her eyes—tenderness, amusement, appeal; then she laughed softly,—

"If I say no, I shall be in the position of 'Nancy Baxter, who refused a man before he ax't her.'"

"But he is going to ask you."

"He has never said so."

"But you know it. Do you mean to marry him?"

"I might do worse."

"If you marry him I shall hate you!"

He was startled by his own vehemence, but even in the first moment of his surprise he admitted that it was effective.

"Why, what is it to you?"

Her voice sounded cold, she made such an effort to keep it calm.

"What is it to me? It is everything to me; surely you have known that long enough now?"

She had drawn backward from him, and stood leaning against the frame of the door, her face in shadow, as she looked down into his upturned, eager eyes.

"Is it nothing to you how much I care? Am I not even to have an answer?" he went on after a moment, with petulant vehemence.

"What can I answer?"

"Say that you care—say that you will spare me a rival."

"I don't think you fear a rival; in the depths of your heart, I don't think you dread Mr Page."

Before the tremulous words had fallen from her lips, Roderick Weston had taken her in his arms and kissed her. For half an hour longer they stood together in the moonlight, heaven's gate ajar for both of them.

"I shall tell no one till you wish it. I want to keep our happiness all to myself for a time," she whispered as he was about to leave her.

Unconsciously his hand relaxed its clasp of hers as she spoke. The suggestion of others had reminded Mr Weston that that moonlight

night would have a morrow, and that his words involved him in consequences.

No one had missed *Ida* much in her absence, for the *Page* affair seemed to have progressed so far that night that *Mrs Deane* had accepted *Mrs Dempster's* congratulations, and had exercised her powers of narration to dazzle the school inspector's widow with pictures of *Mr Page's* possessions and prospects.

"And to think that even in her father's lifetime we should have thought it such an excellent match!" *Mrs Deane* interjected tearfully; "while now, with things so different—"

"It reflects the greatest credit on you," *Mrs Dempster* said promptly.

In her sister's prospects *Maysie* had found her own little personal joy.

Of course the occasion merited the very grandest wedding that was possible, and with herself for bridesmaid-in-chief, and *Mr Weston* for groomsmen—well, everyone knew what that conjunction involved.

The trio in the little parlour looked very interested and happy when *Ida* joined them, though they were discussing only commonplaces with a zest that might have seemed suspicious to any observation less preoccupied than hers. In their desire to hide from her that she had been under discussion, they neither addressed nor looked at her, and so never noticed the soft fire in her dreamy eyes, or the absorption of her whole bearing. To her own consciousness she seemed to have just quitted a sanctuary, bearing about her still the aroma of the incense.

Meantime, *Roderick Weston* was walking hurriedly towards his hotel, feeling elated, yet depressed; proud of himself, yet ashamed;

conscious of having done a mean thing, yet glad that he had done it well.

He had been tempted beyond his strength—that was what he had told himself; and yet he was angry with himself for having yielded, angry with Mrs Deane for having put him in the way of temptation, with Mr Page for having irritated him, and so induced the climax, with Ida for not having resisted him.

"How she does love me, and how she will hate me in a week or two!" he said to himself with mingled elation and regret.

Miss Lipsome was going to the seaside; but, before betaking herself thither, a visit to every church member seemed imperative. Miss Lipsome took her parochial duties very seriously, and perhaps found more consolation therein than in the gratitude of those for whom she laboured.

"It is Miss Lipsome," Mrs Deane said to her daughter, as the thin tone of the door bell jangled imperiously through the house. "Will you receive her, while I change my cap?"

The rector's sister was obviously fagged. She stood on the doorstep panting a little as she told Ida that she had called at twenty houses, that everyone was at home, and that but for the thought of seeing her dear Mrs Deane at the last she never could have borne up against her fatigue.

"Mamma will be very glad to see you," Ida answered warmly, and ushered her into the parlour, where she found a cosy armchair, deposited herself in it, and then proceeded to utter kind spasmodic little sentences.

By-and-by Mrs Deane, in her newest head dress, entered, found Miss Lipsome in a state of

exhaustion, and immediately ordered tea as a restorative, to prepare which Ida made her exit.

The kitchen fire had gone low, the Deanes not being fashionable enough to indulge in afternoon tea in a general way ; but a little coaxing mended that, and by-and-by everything was ready.

There was a pretty little *tête-à-tête* service in the pantry cupboard, and Ida took it out carefully and polished it, with a little pride in its prettiness. It was the last Christmas present she and Maysie had given their mother.

She carried everything into the room carefully, for the little blue and gold tray was laden to its limits, and she deposited her burden on the table before she looked up smilingly. While life lasted she would remember, with photographic minuteness of detail, everything she saw. Miss Lipsome was sitting by the window, her bonnet strings untied, her bright, rosy little face dimpling with eagerness, her plump hands flashing here and there as she talked. Opposite her was Mrs Deane, in a state of hushed immobility, her little, pinched features looking grave and grey, all but the eyes, which were large and solemn.

"Mr Weston is to marry Miss Hall, the solicitor's daughter — did you know?" Mrs Deane cried suddenly, with a tremor of dismay in the thin tones of her voice, turning as Ida entered.

"No, I did not know."

She did not realise what they meant, so there was no merit in it that she drew the drapery of the little side-table straight before she looked at them.

"I don't think Roderick told anyone but me till now," Miss Lipsome said complacently; "and I am sure many of his friends will be surprised,

for the thing will seem hurried at the last. The marriage will take place in October, as soon as Mr Lipsome and I are back."

"Indeed!"

She took it all in now, with a horrid sensation of faintness and deadly chill, that yet must be veiled behind assumed indifference.

"I thought he might have let some of you know; he has been so confidential with you all. But he can be discreet about his own business, and, no doubt, until everything was quite settled he was wiser to keep silence."

"And is everything quite settled now?"

"Yes; Mr Hall has given his consent at last. He was very hard to persuade, for Nellie is an only child and his heiress, and from a worldly point of view, I admit, the match is poor for her; but then, as I said to Mr Hall, when pleading for them, what does anything matter but mutual devotion? And Roderick and she have been all the world to each other since they met first."

"You know all about it?"

The girl was lying back languidly in a low wicker chair, thankful for the support it offered her, thankful for her accustomed pallor that did not betray her now.

"Yes, I know all about it; I was in the confidence of both. That is the advantage of being an old maid—young people trust you and tell you things."

"And are you quite sure there is no mistake?"

It was Mrs Deane who put this question, though with a hopeless intonation in her voice.

"Mistake!" Miss Lipsome laughed. "They have been engaged to each other since last

October; they settled it between themselves romantically at Riff, in the dull season, but it was only a week ago that Mr Hall gave his consent."

"Only a week ago!" Ida echoed.

Then he had been formally engaged that night when he told her he loved her. Such an icy thrill of many mingled emotions swept over her that she wondered Miss Lipsome did not see her shiver.

"We are so glad, my brother and I, for we are very fond of Roderick," Miss Lipsome went on, entirely enwrapped in her narrative; "and this marriage will be advantageous to him in every way. Nellie will make a charming wife, and Mr Hall's influence will be so useful to Roderick."

"And are you sure he is fond of her?"

"Quite sure; he has told me everything from the very beginning. If I had not been quite convinced of the strength and tenderness of his affection, I would not have pleaded for him as I have done with Mr Hall."

"I am sure they will make a very handsome couple," Mrs Deane said, with a feeble attempt to consider the subject in the abstract.

Miss Lipsome assented thoughtfully.

"He is distinguished looking, and she is very pretty. I have no doubt it was her appearance attracted him in the first instance, and her merits that attached him afterwards. Now that everything is settled I have ventured to scold him a little, have told him that she is much too good for him, and that he must abandon all his idle, flirting, frivolous ways. I dare say neither of you could believe it, but Roderick has, to my certain knowledge, gone very far

with many girls; however, that is all over now; Nellie will keep him straight."

Ida could bear no more. She rose weakly and held out her hand.

"I have a music lesson to give in High Street, and it is almost my hour," she said, "so I must ask you to excuse me if I withdraw."

Miss Lipsome assented cheerfully. Her visit had really been to Mrs Deane, and now that she was *tête-à-tête* with her she would try to investigate how far Roderick Weston had carried his flirtation with the girls. Miss Lipsome knew dear Roderick's way, and that he never meant any harm, but she sincerely hoped that he had not been trifling thoughtlessly with the widow's daughters.

Ida Deane went limply upstairs and locked herself into her own room, and then sat down with clasped hands to stare blankly at her despair.

Give a music lesson in High Street, when all she could do was to keep herself from falling prone in her misery and abasement! What a scoundrel he was—what a base, heartless scoundrel! And she had loved him! For a moment she felt as if she hated herself ten times more than she hated him, as if his kisses had made her so vile that not all the waters of the universe would purify her while she lived.

Engaged at Riff, and an accepted suitor a week ago! Then what had she been—she, with her pride of intellect and scorn of ordinary men!—she who had been wont to jest at love and all its homely, humdrum consequences? She had been the plaything that kept Miss Hall's lover amused, while he waited the comfortable arrangement of his advantageous marriage.

For a moment the girl wondered if it would be very wicked to kill Roderick Weston.

"Are you there, Ida?"

"Yes."

"Then will you open the door?"

Miss Lipsome had been fenced with and defeated. Like other weak creatures, Mrs Deane had grown courageous and wise in defence of her offspring. If Miss Lipsome had any suspicions regarding Mr Weston's bearing in Belvoir Street, the little widow allayed them valiantly. Mr Weston had, on her showing, always been kind and gentlemanly, as might have been anticipated of the rector's friend, and her girls had liked him, of course, as well as they could like anyone of whom they knew so little, but beyond mere acquaintanceship there was nothing—nothing whatever, and Mrs Deane was exceedingly glad that Mr Weston was going to be happy. So much she maintained stoutly, fronting her guest dauntlessly with eyes and lips that never faltered, though the heart within her lay sick and sore.

What if Mr Page proved treacherous too?—what if all her visions anent the girls were but visions? In that case Mrs Deane would never permit herself to dream again.

The visitor was satisfied, and left at last; and then Mrs Deane groped her way upstairs and knocked falteringly at her daughter's door.

"I did not know you had got back," she said in a voice that shook a little. "Will you let me in? I have something to say to you."

"Is it very important?"

"Yes; I wish to talk something over with you; but if you are doing your harmony exercises, don't let me disturb you—I can wait."

Oh, rare self-sacrifice of motherhood! To have absorbed herself in bitter speculation, leaving Ida undisturbed, would have been torture to her, and yet she volunteered it.

The girl opened the door, and stood on the threshold, very tall, and grave, and pale, ready to listen and answer, yet on the defensive even against love and sympathy.

"I want to talk to you about what Miss Lipsome told us. Do you think it is true?"

"About Mr Weston's marriage? Of course it is. Why should it not be true?"

Mrs Deane began to cry.

"Then, my dear, I think he is a very wicked young man," she said dispiritedly.

"Why?"

"Oh, coming here as he did, and devoting himself so. I feel as if I dare not tell her. It will break her heart!"

"Whose heart?"

"Maysie's. Did you not know? Have you never noticed? But I suppose you have not, with Mr Page taking off your attention from other things."

Then Ida laughed. The addition of the comic element, in the person of her sister, seemed momentarily to take the edge off her bitterness. She so wrapped up in Mr Page as to be blind to Mr Weston's devotion to Maysie! There was a little dreary fun in the suggestion.

She patted her mother's shoulder caressingly, and there was a kind of mirthful glitter in her eyes.

"I don't think Maysie will suffer as much as you imagine. I don't think that Mr Weston has ever involved himself there," she said; "but if he has— Well, I don't know that we can help ourselves."

Mrs Deane acquired the melancholy certainty that day that her younger daughter had no heart.

CHAPTER VI

It was fifteen years from the time that Ida Deane had concluded that the whole world was hollow because she had found her own particular doll stuffed with sawdust, and Mrs Granby was giving an afternoon concert in her spacious drawing-room in Prince's Gate, West London.

The proceeds of the concert were to be in aid of charity, for Mrs Granby had thrown herself into beneficence as other women throw themselves into frivolity, and had enrolled all the people she could influence, sympathetic or other, in the good cause.

Mrs Granby loved notoriety and prominence. Ill-natured people said she loved nothing else half so well, and in a certain direction, and among a certain set of people, she had attained it by her beneficence. Here the spiteful spoke again, and said that her achievements never cost her anything but a little of the fussing that she delighted in; that the large sums which followed her name in subscription lists always came out of other people's pockets, and that Mrs Granby's philanthropy was not of the kind that seeks its reward in a better world than this.

But what her detractors said affected the lady no way; she liked to have important people take guinea seats in her drawing-room in the name of charity, and if she could coax celebrities to entertain them for nothing, her satisfaction was complete.

On the occasion in question she had prepared an attractive musical programme, and had disposed of every ticket she possessed, and was in the seventh heaven of delight. The entertainment would be reported in the morning papers with, perhaps, the names of her most distinguished guests appended; the "object" she was labouring for would be materially helped, and the whole thing would not cost her one shilling.

It did not militate in the least against Mrs Granby's satisfaction that several of the purchasers of guinea tickets hated music, found her concert an unpardonable bore, and, for the time being, detested her, because she had induced them thither, and would be certain to so induce them again.

But the entertainment ended at last, for those who enjoyed it and for those who did not, equally, and Mrs Granby was speeding her guests.

"So glad you are pleased; thank you for coming! Good-bye—good-bye!" She had her little remark for everyone as the room slowly thinned, till the very last loiterer of all—a tall, slim man stopped to address her.

"I was wishing for a last word with you all the afternoon, Mr Weston," the lady said effusively; "for I have got a pretty thing to tell you, just as a reward for coming, you know. What do you think I have been asked about you twice this very day? Why, if you were not the Marquis of Pergament, the Duke of Woolshire's son, you know?"

Mr Weston smiled. It was not the first time he had been mistaken for this distinguished aristocrat, and to his own inner consciousness it was a good many years since he had begun to get

himself up after the model in question, just as men of another type form their outer man after a royal and better-known pattern.

"Mrs Granby knows so well how to say charming things," Mr Weston answered, with rather heavy gallantry. He had not improved in the years that had elapsed since he had sought out the Deane girls at Riff.

Certain men do improve from youth to middle-age, but it is not men of Roderick Weston's type. His hair had thinned a good deal above the forehead, and this accident emphasised the length and narrowness of his face, while the general tintlessness of his aspect, that had been a distinction in youth, was unbecoming now, like premature decay.

"And what did you think of my recital?" Mrs Granby went on, after shaking her fan at him archly.

Mr Weston expressed his appreciation with much warmth, and then asked carelessly who a certain lady pianist had been.

"Ah! you found her out; but you have a knack always of discerning the best. She is wonderful, is she not? Such soul, such fire, quite thrown away, I say, in the position she insists on holding. That is Miss Deane, a music teacher. Just think of it—only that, when she might make her fortune with other aims. She gives my girls music lessons, and so I have once or twice secured her for affairs like to-day's; but she will play for no one but me, though so many people have wanted her for one form of entertainment or another, offering her her own terms."

"What a pity!" Roderick Weston said gravely.

"Yes, is it not? But that is her way. She

has whims, like all your very clever people. However, we need not pity her, because, in her own way, she is very successful. She has written half a dozen songs that have caught the popular fancy, and you have no idea what an income they make for her. And then she has pupils to fill up all her time, and her lessons are very expensive. I daresay she is quite as rich as any of us, though in her own way—of course, in her own way.”

“Could you let me have her address? I have two cousins who want to finish in music,” Mr Weston said, improvising these young ladies readily.

The address was given verbally, and hastily pencilled on a card, and with profuse thanks he withdrew.

During the years that had intervened between Roderick Weston's youth and middle-age important changes had taken place, as they usually do, even in that of unchronicled individuals. Little Mrs Deane had brought her small anxieties and small triumphs to a close, and was peacefully sleeping in one of the cemeteries outside Fordham; Maysie had married Mr Page, to his own and her perfect satisfaction, for the draper had not carried his admiration of her sister the length of verbal overtures.

“He found Ida too high and stand-offish on closer acquaintance,” Maysie told some of her intimates with much relish, feeling that her virtues in the end had distanced Ida's charms.

In the time that had intervened, the firm of Hewlett & Watson had gained importance in Fordham, and Mr Page had long ceased to be looked on as junior partner. He was now the acting member of the firm, *vice* his superannuated

seniors, and naturally his wife thought a good deal of herself, and held her head as high as anyone. But for all that Mrs Page had her secret grief and annoyance. What was the good of her having attained to wealth and honour if she had a sister on the spot who disgraced her—a sister who would neither accept a home from her nor such a husband as she could provide for her, and who persisted in the unbecoming occupation of music teaching?

Maysie never drove through Belvoir Street, whether in a hired conveyance or, later, in her own private brougham, without feeling outraged by the sight of the brass door-plate, lettered "Miss Deane, Music Teacher." What was the good of being elegantly clothed, and occupying a foremost position, if your sister degraded herself publicly by earning her bread?

It was not natural to Maysie to make herself unpleasant, but desperate occasions require desperate measures, and the little woman got into the habit of nagging as persistently as a dimpled, plump, pretty little woman can. Ida bore this for a year or two with patience, slightly tinged with scorn, but, after her mother's death, she wearied of it. She was clever, and knew it, and, outside Fordham, she felt sure there was room for ability. Like most independent people who possess a gift, she decided to move Londonwards when she moved at all, and thus it happened that, fifteen years from their last interview, she met Roderick Weston again.

In the time the world had used him fairly well; he was moderately successful, but no more; men who take important steps aimlessly rarely attain to the greatest things, and Mr Weston had got his deserts. If those involved

divers disagreeables now and again, possibly no one who knew him would have quarrelled with the justice of that award. But, of course, he did not look on himself as a failure; his father-in-law's influence had helped him, and his wife's money had helped him, and a fair share of business had fallen to his lot, and if he knew that he stood much lower professionally than in his early dreams, he believed that was only because the ambitions of youth invariably vaulted too high.

Now that he was arrived at middle life, he was conscious of a change in himself; he felt rather than knew that his aspirations were lower, his conceit smaller, his egotism less pronounced. If years do not improve people, at least they soften them, and Roderick Weston, at forty, found himself with fewer friends, and fewer enemies, and a smaller audience generally than he had possessed at twenty-five.

It was half a dozen years now since his wife had died, leaving him childless and lonely enough, and into the large, handsome house which Mr Hall had furnished for him after his marriage, ghosts from the past had a trick of trooping now and then; not ghosts of those who had dwelt there, rather ghosts of such as he had met at life's crossings.

From his past his enemies recalled occasionally more than one questionable transaction, but somehow nothing stung himself, now in his respectable manhood, more than the memory of his conduct to Ida Deane. She had been so young, and pretty, and unprotected, that in thinking the matter over he felt as if he had robbed a child and escaped with the plunder.

He had never seen her from that night when

he had kissed her and won the confession of her affection, and he thought the thing he had once called his love for her was quite over, but at sight of her, a serene, stately woman, far more beautiful than in her girlhood, the dormant emotion stirred, and, with a sense of shame, awoke. She was the one woman in the world that he had ever perfectly admired; she was the one woman in the world that he would have chosen always had the fetters of self-interest and worldly wisdom and covetousness not hampered him.

But these were broken now; he was old enough to please himself, lonely enough to realise that few people cared what he did, successful enough to despise question and censure. He drew out the card with her address, and looked at it, his slow pulse leaping a little.

He would go to her then and there; and he wondered how she would receive him, and what she would say. She would forgive him ultimately—that he never doubted. Was not pleading his forte? And now, with his cause at heart—

But he went home first and made a careful toilette, reflecting, as he brushed his hair before the mirror, that he was growing confoundingly bald.

Ida Deane was very prosperous, as Mrs Granby had intimated. She had handsome apartments in a good house in the Bayswater end of the town—apartments tastefully furnished to begin with, and brightened up and individualised by little personal belongings.

She had been writing at a large leather-covered davenport that stood endways towards the light, and had risen to try at the piano the effect of a

few bars in her composition, when the door opened, and Roderick Weston was unexpectedly announced. She turned round suddenly, with the sheet of music in her hand, and stood before him, a tall, beautiful, mature woman, with the memory of her lost youth showing itself in the sudden pallor of her face.

The one love of a lifetime dies hard. It was years since she had learned to appraise Roderick Weston at his just value, but she had loved him once, and, for an instant, his presence, and the crowding memories that accompanied it, had power to turn her white and speechless.

He did not speak for a moment; he simply stood on the threshold and gazed at her, then he said in a low, grave tone,—

“May I come in?”

The sound of his voice restored her to herself. She laid the sheet of music aside, indicated a chair with a gracious wave of the hand, and seated herself.

“I saw you to-day at Mrs Granby’s,” he went on, speaking still in that hushed, suppressed voice. “It is so long since we parted, that you seemed gone quite out of my life. Meeting you to-day was like a resurrection.”

She bowed. At first she could not have spoken; now she would not help him by a word. He had sought this interview, let him explain its meaning.

“So long time has elapsed since we parted, and so much has happened, that I have almost feared to approach you. In the years that have fled, you have distanced me, as I always knew you would.”

“I teach music successfully, if you mean that,” she answered coldly.

"I do not mean that; but no matter. Have you learned to forgive me since we parted?"

She deliberated an instant, then answered,—
"Yes."

He had expected a commonplace disclaimer, but she made none.

"I acted shamefully towards you. I can never forgive myself," he said, with lowered eyes.

"Why revive that now?" She was coolly surveying the changes in him. "From your point of view, and among your friends, I should have thought it would be nothing exceptional to make love to a girl, who, if she had been wise, would have understood perfectly that you were amusing yourself without thought of her in the matter."

"It all seems very base now," he murmured helplessly; "but, at the time, there were extenuating circumstances."

"Possibly. But really it does not matter, Mr Weston. It is all so far away. If you regret conduct that was unmanly and unprovoked, I am glad for your sake; but beyond that I have no interest in the matter."

"You cannot forgive me?"

"You mistake. I forgive you fully. I dare say in your world a little trifling is of very frequent occurrence."

"I have come to ask your pardon," he said humbly. In the minutes that had elapsed since he entered the room, her presence had so dominated him that he could have knelt to her for the mere joy of coming nearer her.

"There is nothing to forgive. Injuries don't harm us if we are strong. It is only because so many are weak that cruelties become so cruel."

"I loved you all the time."

"Then I am sorry, for your wife's sake and your own. To me it is of no consequence. Since you were false, it does not matter, from my point of view, to whom you were false. Perhaps you cannot understand judgment becoming perfectly impersonal."

"But she never knew; I made her happy," Roderick Weston went on, abjectly. For the moment he did not know he was lying, retrospect had become so swallowed up in strong emotion. "And she is dead—you know that; and I have come back—"

Ida Deane rose, the creamy whiteness of her skin flushed with a sudden rush of colour.

"I hope you will say nothing you will regret, Mr Weston;" then after a pause she added, "I should be glad to end an interview that must be painful to both."

"Then you are angry still?"

"Angry? Oh, no; anger does not last for years and years."

"And you could never think of me again—could never reinstate me?" he asked huskily. "I should be so true—now."

"No; I could never think of you again."

"But you cared once?"

"Yes; but all that is dead. Let it lie; it was beautiful in its beginning, and shameful in its ending to me, who believed you so great, and found you so base."

He drew a short breath, and his lips twitched a little.

"You have been kind to be so frank, and to make the truth so unmistakable."

He stood for an instant looking at her—he a pallid, middle-aged man with pleading eyes; she a proud, serene, beautiful woman, whom the

years seemed impotent to injure—then, without another word he opened the door softly, and softly closed it after him, passing for ever out of her life.

Shaken out of herself and the peace of her existence momentarily, Ida Deane shed an angry tear or two ; but no one who saw her that night or afterwards guessed that a breath from a passionate past had that day ruffled for a moment the noontide calm of her existence. Ida Deane is one of the spinsters whom it were supererogation to pity.

AN INTERLUDE

MRS LONGLANDS seemed portentously busy with the long golf stocking, of intricate plaid pattern, that grew and grew on the bright needles between her fingers; but anyone who had watched her face, the twitching of her lips, the slight frowns and nods with which she emphasised her silent communings, would have known that she was debating some weighty matter with herself, and that the work in her hands progressed mechanically.

Mrs Longlands sat by the front parlour window, which looked out on the prim rose garden, with its box borders and long avenues of stiff rose bushes in richest bloom. She was a handsome, florid, middle-aged woman, with an erect carriage, fine teeth, and a masterful air; just the type of woman who might be expected to manage successfully a large farm, and make it pay even in bad times; who might be also expected to have a husband of philosophic and patient mind, and children of a non-combative disposition.

Mr Longlands had been a meek man, who lacked robustness, and had died in early middle life. Of the two children he left, William, the son, was now a young man of four-and-twenty, and Jessie, the daughter, a shrewd and handsome girl of fifteen.

Mrs Longlands gave a long sigh, as she looked down the garden. Across the transverse path

at the bottom her son was walking, aimlessly plucking twigs and leaves of privet from the hedge as he passed, and biting at them or flinging them on the ground in abstraction.

"I will have to give in," Mrs Longlands said to herself, dejectedly. "He'll beat me in the long run, and I may as well let him have his way soon as late."

She tucked the stocking under her arm, sticking the ball of wool on the end of her needles; then she rose, opened the hall door, and went out.

The westering sun touched the thick coils of her brown hair, that had scarcely a grey thread in it, as she went down the garden path, and dazzled her eyes a little, for she had not waited to put on her garden hat.

"I thought you had come out to clip that hedge," she began; "you said it needed clipping."

William gave a slight start, and looked guilty. "I forgot," he stammered.

"I fancied you had. I have been watching you all the afternoon. William, if it is that girl who is still in your mind, I will not stand longer in the way. It is not what I'd have wished, and you know that I'd have chosen someone belonging to the place for you if I'd had my way. It's a help to a man when his wife's people can hold their own in the eyes of the country; but, if your heart is set on this fancy of yours, I give in."

Mrs Longlands expected a burst of rapture over this generous concession; but William only said, "The more I think of it, the more I believe she won't have me."

"Then you consider her a bigger fool than I do," the mother answered drily.

"You don't value her aright; women never

do when it's another woman. But there's not the like of her in the world ; and what am I ? ”

“ You're in love,” Mrs Longlands answered, with a disdainful wave of the hand. “ Your father talked just the same about me till we were married ; then he changed his tune. You'll do the same.”

“ I'm glad you don't dislike her,” the young man said, with a sigh. He was tall and dark, and had a fine, young, beardless face, and a slim figure that would probably be much handsomer when it broadened and filled out.

“ She'll be an ornament about the place,” Mrs Longlands admitted ; “ and I don't suppose she'll want to interfere with me. I daresay we'll get on better together than if she'd been one of my own sort. And then, I suppose, she'll keep on teaching Jessie, and that will be a saving.”

The girl with whom William Longlands had fallen in love was the governess at the Vicarage, whose instructions his sister Jessie had been permitted to share with the vicar's daughters, as a matter of economy in view of Miss Lethbridge's salary. Jessie had resented being brought home from a boarding school to take daily lessons at the Vicarage, and had affirmed that she was good enough to have a governess all to herself, till her mother impressed on her that, by the arrangement she had made with Mrs Williams, the vicar's wife, considerable economies were effected, and Jessie's social status bettered at the same time. Under ordinary circumstances, she could hardly have expected to be on intimate terms with the vicar's daughters, but this matter of monetary expediency rendered it essential.

The vicar's governess was very charming, intelligent, sympathetic, and exceedingly pretty; and as Jessie Longlands was several years older than the Williams girls, it was she who became Miss Lethbridge's favourite pupil and companion. On many a Saturday afternoon Miss Lethbridge and the Vicarage girls came to Dalyforth farm for tea, and wandered among the fields and through the rose garden and the old orchard during long, sweet summer evenings, and it was there William Longland's romance began.

Jessie failed to observe the development which was quite clear to Mrs Longlands; she thought it was on her account her brother was so attentive when she entertained company.

Since his mother was satisfied, and all seemed to promise plain sailing, William should have been content; but he was in love, and he was desperately shy. The letters he wrote to the object of his affections, and destroyed subsequently, would have made a good-sized volume, while on the occasion of every chance encounter with her he was stricken dumb.

"Ask her up one Sunday evening alone," he begged of his mother, "and I will see her home and speak then."

"You have nothing to be afraid of," Mrs Longlands said a little contemptuously. "She is likely to know on which side her bread is buttered. I think she will find it better to be young mistress here, than nothing and nobody at the Vicarage."

"She would never think of that; she will only think whether or not she cares for me."

"And why should she not care?"

"But why should she?"

"Oh, you are silly," the mother answered

impatiently. She could not tell him that she considered him a prize for any woman.

"Look at her cleverness and her accomplishments. She knows more Latin than Mr Williams, and more French than Mademoiselle that taught Jessie at school, and you know how she sings."

"Well, it's her trade to be accomplished. Nobody thanks a carpenter for saying how much can be made out of a deal board."

"You don't admire her," William said regretfully.

"She is a nice little thing; and there are people that prefer goods in small bundles. I don't myself; but it's a matter of taste."

"Mother, if she refuses me I'll die."

"Not you," Mrs Longlands answered with a full-throated laugh that showed all her white teeth; "but she'll not put you to the test anyway."

It was a sweet June afternoon when Miss Lethbridge came across the meadow to pass the time intervening before evening service with the Longlands. She had it before her that, if things were very pleasant, she could miss church for once, and then William Longlands would see her home. That had happened before, and at thought of it the young lady walked a little faster, and there was a new dash of colour in her cheeks.

"It will be for the last time," she said, looking round her, as though challenging invisible eyes to observe her rectitude of purpose; and then her head drooped, her pace grew listless, and the shadows gathered greyly about her lips and eyes.

Having given her sanction to the admission

of a stranger into her family, Mrs Longlands meant to open the doors in a hospitable and handsome way. The house wore a festive aspect, the parlour was fragrant with the odour of heavy-headed roses, and a real silver tea-service sparkled in the pantry, awaiting the hour of its due appearance in the parlour; as to her Crown Derby chinaware, Mrs Longlands only hoped that Miss Lethbridge understood enough of values in ceramics to appreciate it. "She'll see for once the best that can be had in a farmhouse," the mother said.

Tea was on the table before William strolled in; he saw his mother's preparations, and they reminded him that the occasion was momentous.

But in spite of Mrs Longlands' best tea cakes and all the elegant properties that flanked them, the meal was not a success. William was pre-occupied or over-assiduous, Miss Lethbridge shy and abstracted, while Mrs Longlands told too much of the family history, and proved too clearly that connection with the Longlands would be a great honour for most girls.

The Longlands were a good old yeoman family of long descent and thrifty ideas, possessed, furthermore, of the prudent habit of never breaking into multitudinous children, so that the paternal acres, which had been in the family for some twelve generations, had seldom been encroached upon to provide for younger sons. William Longlands had a pedigree many a baron bold would have been proud of, and on this fact Mrs Longlands was a little too prone to dilate. Perhaps it was as well that she was disposed to be fluent that afternoon, as it furthered the concealment of such emotions as the rest of the company wished to keep to themselves. Jessie

was probably the only one present who had no consciousness of extra electricity in the air, and enjoyed her tea and Miss Lethbridge's presence without *arrière pensée*. After tea, the young people strolled round the garden, and visited the farmyard, and saw the calves and the young bay mare that would soon be ready to carry a lady.

"Am I to learn to ride?" Jessie asked delightedly, and William answered abstractedly that perhaps she might, but he had not thought about it.

No one went to evening service. They heard the church bell booming over the tree tops with a delightful sense of playing truant, but they sang hymns to the piano to prove their consciousness of the sacredness of the day.

When Miss Lethbridge was going home at night, Jessie, the ubiquitous, ran to fetch her hat that she might accompany her and William, but Mrs Longlands declared that the night air was not suited to a delicate chest, and that Jessie must not run any risks until her cold was better.

"I have no cold," Jessie said in astonishment.

"You coughed in your sleep last night," the mother averred, and, as the girl could not disprove this statement, she remained at home perforce.

As Mrs Longlands watched her son and his companion disappear in the moonlight, she sighed. "It is a hardship when a girl has to support herself," she said; and then she added, irrelevantly, "I don't think any mother could act fairer."

Mrs Longlands dismissed Jessie to bed when the silver and china had been put away, and then she sat down to await her son's return

She felt a little depressed, and tried to evolve comfort for herself from thoughts of his childhood, and of the time before he realised that the world contained women more lovable than his mother.

Nearly three hours elapsed before William returned; then he let himself in with his latch-key, and went straight to his room. Mrs Longlands followed him upstairs with some tremor of the heart. It was not surely possible that the girl could have been ungrateful enough, mad enough, to treat him with indifference!

There was no light in William's room, save that of the moon through the uncurtained window, as Mrs Longlands turned the door handle.

"I wanted to make sure it was you before locking up," she said a little apologetically.

"It's I, all right," he answered lightly.

"I thought you would have been back long ago."

"I went for a walk instead of coming straight home; the night is so splendid."

"Then you have nothing to tell me?" Mrs Longlands asked in some disappointment.

"Only that she has refused me."

The mother drew a step nearer. "Not really?" she said in a low tone, adding helplessly, "after all our kindness, too."

"Oh, kindness!" he said with a little shrug "I think that was for our own pleasure."

"What has she against you?" the mother asked with some impatience. "There is not a girl of the district would have refused you; and to think of an interloper like that—"

"She does not care for me, mother, that is the simple explanation; position has nothing to do with it."

"I wonder what she expects," Mrs Longlands went on; "it is not everyone would want a girl without friends, that works for her living."

William sat down and rested his averted face impatiently on his hand. "There is no use in considering the objections, since the thing is not going to be," he said.

"Well, I call it a piece of impudence," said Mrs Longlands, whose anger was rising, "and you will call it the same in time; you will get a girl worth twenty of her, take my word for it." Then she kissed her son with one of the rare kisses that marked a solemn occasion, advised him to sleep on his sorrow, and assured him it would seem less in the morning. "She has more to regret than you have," she added as she opened the door.

It might have comforted Mrs Longlands had she known that the culprit thought so too.

Kneeling by her little white bed, Miss Lethbridge was weeping agonisedly in that inarticulate sorrow that seems to deaden even the relevancy of thought. As the hours passed, and the moon crept slowly behind the house, the girl's tears ceased from mere exhaustion; then she crept into bed, dressed as she was, meaning only to rest a little, but she fell asleep.

A week later Jessie astonished her kindred with the information that Miss Lethbridge had intimated to Mrs Williams her wish to leave, and that she would not come back after the summer holidays.

"I suppose I am driving her away," William said, crestfallen.

"Not you," his mother answered impatiently.

"I would rather leave the parish than that she should," he said resolutely.

"Well, of all the born fools!" Mrs Longlands began. Then she changed her tone. "I think she owes it to you to take herself off, unhappy as she has made you."

But Miss Lethbridge said William's proposal had little to do with her going. He accosted her on her way home from the post-office, and had walked beside her to the Vicarage door.

"I have been long engaged to my cousin, Lewis Enderby," she explained. "He has been absent from home for some time, but now he is coming back, and some family objections that stood between us are about to be removed. I should have had to leave here soon in any case." If ever an expectant bride bore a white face, and had eyes full of woe, this girl did so then.

"I wish I had known from the first that you were engaged," William said, trying to keep every accent of reproach out of his voice.

"How could I know it would matter to anybody?" she asked, with a little petulant pain. "It was my own private affair, which there was no reason to parade."

"Are you not happy?" He felt ashamed of himself that the suggestion gave him some faint sense of comfort.

"There are a great many things with which happiness has nothing to do," she answered in a dull voice.

"But love is not one of them. Do you not love Mr Enderby?"

"I should marry him whether or not."

"Then, I suppose, he is very eligible," he said, a little bitterly.

She gave a husky laugh. "At this moment, I don't think even his best friend could call him that," she said.

Five years later William Longlands, grown big, and brown, and broad, but a bachelor still, was on a business visit to the metropolis. Having an idle evening on his hands, he decided to spend it at an adjacent theatre. To well-brought-up provincials the theatre seems hardly a reputable place, and William had some sense of daring, not wholly free from guilt, as he took his seat in the pit.

The early scenes of most plays are dull, and the visitor from the country was more interested in the lights, the form and arrangement of the theatre, and the aspect of the people surrounding him, than in the dialogue on the stage. Suddenly there entered into a box not far from him a young lady in evening dress, with jewels in her hair and in the black bodice of the gown she wore. She was accompanied by a tall and rather fragile-looking man, with a delicate, clean-shaven face, and fair hair that lay loosely above a high and narrow forehead. William suddenly felt his hands and brow grow damp, an icy breath blew coldly across his face, and the scene before him swayed like a ship at sea. He had grown stout in five years, but he had not forgotten.

After a moment, he lent forward and accosted his neighbour. "Who are they?" he asked, rather hoarsely, unconscious of anything unusual in his action; "I mean the two people in that box to the left."

It was between the acts, and the stranger was pleased to give information. "They are Sir Lewis and Lady Enderby. He is the son of old Enderby, the railway king, and she was his cousin."

"And were they always wealthy?" Longlands asked in the same thick voice.

"Yes, always, in this fellow's lifetime at any rate, but the father was a hard old nut, and kept a very tight hand over the son; gave him his head, and curbed him at exactly the wrong times. There were queer stories about Sir Lewis before he came into his title. It is said he committed forgery, and was actually tried, and got two or three years at Dartmoor, though they managed to keep the facts out of the newspapers. But that is only rumour; the only thing known for certain is that he was out of favour at home for a long time, and that the girl stuck to him loyally, and ultimately married him. It was she who made peace between him and his father, and helped things to come right. He is no end of a philanthropist now, interested in reformatories, and all kinds of help to the handicapped."

"And is she—Lady Enderby—happy?" Longlands asked in a low voice.

"A woman's happiness is just one of the things an outsider can never judge of," the man answered, with a smile. "She has everything to make her happy; but my own notion is that a woman has felt some heartbreak before she devotes all her life to doing good."

"Is that her reputation?" William asked, with a little catch of the breath.

"Yes," the man said, with a touch of emotion. "People call her the best woman in London."

BLACK ART

THERE never had been any sensation known in the village like that which followed the announcement that David Dale had inherited a fortune. He had not been held of much account before this, in spite of his good-looking face and tall, loosely-built figure, for there was an element of the loafer in him, both by nature and education, and an industrious community is wont to hold this type in peculiar disesteem. He was an only child, a posthumous child, too, and his nervous little mother, who never quite recovered from the shock of his father's sudden death, could scarcely bear him out of her sight. David had, therefore, never been put to a trade—his mother saw dangers for him in each—and so his skill developed only in those directions that demand no apprenticeship. If he worked in the fields at harvest time, it was only because his mother could do the same, and by actual observation convince herself that he did not get wounded among the reapers or trampled on by the great farm horses. The neighbours thought this dreadfully silly, but they excused Mrs Dale because they considered her a little "touched"; and when she died, they felt for David's helpless and unprotected condition, although he was twenty-two.

It was late for him then to learn a trade, but

it was open to him to enter farm service; and many would have been glad to employ him, for he was strong and not unskilful; but he preferred to live on in the little two-roomed house with the loft above it, to accept odd jobs of field work as they came his way—as carter's assistant in the spring, as field hand at harvest time, as fruit picker in the autumn, labouring in his garden spasmodically, and snaring rabbits or wild pigeons when his larder ran low, or even accepting a meal from a neighbour without any air of discomfort or disdain. There were girls who fancied David for his good looks and his equable temper; but their fancy was known to be meaningless. One can hardly take a man seriously who lives as irresponsibly and thoughtlessly as a squirrel. Jessie Trench thought it unseemly that he should live like that, and be looked down on and undervalued; and she had taken occasion once or twice to reason with him. But David answered with what was unconsciously the cream of Epicurean philosophy. "One can only be happy," he said; "and I am happier sitting in the sun when the weather's mild, or blowin' a pipe of boortree of a winter's evening, than if I worked regular, and had a sovereign or two to the good."

"But you waste your time," Jessie said reflectively.

David laughed. "Well, I dunno. How much can one do after all, when one is put to it? We all make such a pother to earn something, to be somebody, that we miss the good of living. I have all I want, and I enjoy myself, and what more could I do if I was a king?"

"You could be useful."

"Most folks think they're useful if they only

meddle enough. I mind my own business, and that's something for the neighbours to be thankful for, if they would only look at things that way." From which it will be seen that David was a philosopher whose wisdom deserved honour that the village did not accord it.

He had no expectations from any quarter, nor any traditions of relatives gone far afield into those remote and picturesque regions where wealth may be believed to abound; and, therefore, when a lawyer's letter invited David to call at an office in Nutford that he might hear of something to his advantage, he was as much surprised as anyone. "Maybe someone has left me a watch, or a five-pound note, because I'm not a bad sort of fellow," he thought hopefully, his mind running on legacies in connection with legal communications, as is the rustic way.

The lawyers gave David more trouble than he saw any reason for, insisting on a copy of the marriage certificate of his parents, and a guarantee of his birth and baptism, before they would even supply him with the information that a brother of his father's had died in California, and that David was his heir-at-law.

"How much did he leave?" David asked.

"Fifteen hundred pounds, more or less," was the reply.

We use the expressions "vast fortune," "millions of money," as symbols, without attaching definite meaning to them. To David the words "Fifteen hundred pounds" conveyed exactly the same idea of illimitable potentialities of expenditure and enjoyment. In all his life, odd as it may seem, he had never possessed five shillings, for such purchases as he made were on the credit system, and met by instalments as he earned a

trifle. And to think that now he should have fifteen hundred pounds! He walked back with his head whirling, but before he reached home a definite plan had been evolved in his mind. He was thriftless, but he was not a fool, and his sudden good fortune merely turned his feet into the prudent paths that hitherto he had had no particular reason for treading.

"I will buy a farm," he said, "a bit of freehold. I will look about while they are realising the money; and I will stock it, and get all the implements. That will take a slice off the capital; but then I'll be my own master, and able to live like a king."

At first the story of David's good fortune had been received with some doubt. Visible romance was rare in the neighbourhood; but some neighbours whose curiosity was greater than their scepticism made business excuses for calling on the lawyers, that they might cautiously put a final question regarding David's inheritance. When the statement was confirmed, they overflowed with congratulations. David had no enemies: no man owed him a grudge, no man envied him. As far as it is possible to rejoice in good fortune that was never likely to come their way, the neighbours rejoiced on David's account. And their daughters rejoiced too, but less openly. They had always liked David; now it would be prudent to like him very much indeed, provided the feeling could be rendered reciprocal.

It was wonderful how many people asked David to tea, and listened with respectful eagerness to his plans, and gave the best possible advice regarding his intended investment. And in the matter of new frocks and

fresh ribbons, quite a number of girls blossomed out into sudden beauty.

Jessie Trench watched all these manifestations with eyes to which a sudden spark of bright fire was added. "They are all mighty fond of him now because he is well-to-do," she said. "I was fond of him when he had nothing; but he won't think of that when the others are after him. Men are all alike, soft-headed and as vain as peacocks," which shows that Jessie's personal pain was leading her to unfair generalisations.

Having had a preconception, and having now a grievance, Jessie showed to distinct disadvantage. She never met David without flinging his good fortune and his changed behaviour in his face, and she missed no occasion of saying biting things of whatever person had recently been most cordial with him. This pained David, who was primarily good natured and guileless. When things went amiss with him he had taken it patiently; now that they went well he was glad and content; and, therefore, Jessie's voice broke into his peaceful mood like a croak of disaster. It was not his way to argue or to bandy words with anyone—dislike of unpleasantness was the root of his philosophy. He, therefore, got into the habit of avoiding Jessie, of taking another turn when he saw her coming, or of slipping into somebody's house if she were too near to be escaped that way. All this was gall and wormwood to the girl, who lay awake at night to think it over, and who grew thin and sharp featured pondering it in the daytime. At this period she hated every girl in Grimpat, and now and then almost included David in the category of detestable people.

"But I'll be even with them yet," she said, and let an ugly thought that had crept into her mind grow and grow.

It would be interesting to know on what principle women devoid of almost everything that would seem to make life beautiful or desirable are credited with supernatural powers—why to women who have enriched their own lives with nothing should be ascribed the power of being able to confer limitless good fortune on others—why it is always the saddest, the ugliest, the most unfortunate that are called witches. The district had its witch—a forlorn old woman, whom popular opinion had conspired to keep outside the village, and popular disfavour to render very desolate. They called her "Mother Murgatroyd." And they had a superstitious dread of handling her money, which circumstance alone kept Mother Murgatroyd beyond the reach of destitution. She possessed a single half-crown, which it was her art to keep as bright as when it emerged from the Mint. Mother Murgatroyd never begged. When she required anything, she went where it was on sale, asked for it, and laid down her shining coin. "I won't take your money, good mother; you are welcome to what you require," the vendor would say politely, pushing the coin and the purchase together towards her. A man of curmudgeon tendencies had once accepted the coin, giving her change with her purchase; but the whole village knew before nightfall that when he next looked in his money drawer that peculiar coin was absent, while Mother Murgatroyd presented it on the evening of the same day elsewhere. What they did not know was

that his wife had run with it after Mother Murgatroyd, and had thrust it into her hand, saying, "We cannot take your money."

The thought that had come into Jessie Trench's mind, born of mingled feelings of love and hate, ambition, rage and disappointment, was to buy a love-philtre from Mother Murgatroyd for the winning of David Dale.

A thought like this does not come instantaneously; it grows, and is reasoned with in detail before it finally dominates. It was only David's good Jessie thought she desired—his happiness, his possession by a wife who loved him, and not by a wife who merely desired to share his good fortune.

If David's indifference were the only obstacle that stood in the way of this desirable consummation, it would be fair enough to overcome it by whatever means were available. Nevertheless, it was hardly with a confident aspect that Jessie slipped from her own house one evening, and making a wide detour, as if her goal were in quite another direction, crept up at last through the dusk to the one-windowed cottage, whose red eye blinked ominously into the gloom. The girl had merely raised her hand to knock at the door, when it opened of itself, and Mother Murgatroyd stood on the threshold, her black cat looking up with an air of hungry wildness by her side.

"I wanted a word with you?" Jessie said. Her face was muffled in her shawl, and her voice sounded huskily through it.

"You are welcome; I knew you were coming," the old woman answered.

"How did you know it?" Jessie asked, when the door had closed behind her.

A wood fire was glowing on the hearth, and

bunches of herbs hung amid other comestibles from the roof. Only the old woman's face and the black cat supported the traditions of the eerie.

"I knew you would come to me about six weeks from the time David Dale came into his fortune."

"He has not got his fortune yet."

"No. He will get it in five days; that will just leave time to prepare what you want."

"Oh! you *are* a witch!" Jessie cried in terrified admiration.

Mother Murgatroyd seemed well pleased. "I shouldn't think much of myself if I wasn't a witch sometimes," she answered complacently.

"What will you want for it?" Jessie asked rather fearfully.

"For the charm that will win David Dale's heart? Oh, only a trifle when the work is done. The price of his best field of oats when you are his wife. You will be able to afford that, and he's so easy going he will never miss it."

Jessie drew a breath of relief. She had half expected to be asked for some unholy equivalent—her soul, some years of her life, or something else equally awful and abstract. The price of a field of oats was a very human and homely thing.

"You shall have that with pleasure," she said readily. "And now, tell me how it will work. How soon shall I know that I have won him?"

"You will know very soon. He will soften to you at once from his taking of it; but it will not be till he comes back again that he will declare himself."

"Yes; and how must I give it to him?"

"Either in your own house or his. Your own for choice, that would be most seemly. Every-

body entertains him now, so you can do the same."

"Yes, yes. Now give it to me, and take my promise of the payment anyhow you like."

"I couldn't give it to you; you must make it yourself."

"Oh!" Jessie said, with some dismay. "I thought you kept things like that in jars, and sold them to people in distress."

"I may have done when I was younger, but spells of that kind are not the best. You work them with your own hands and then they won't fail."

"And what will it involve me in?" Jessie asked falteringly. This view of the case seemed to imply a double responsibility.

"Nothing! You give it to him, and that's an end of the matter."

"And him? It won't do him any harm?"

"Not a bit; except to warm his heart with a love he never felt before."

"I would rather lose him than harm him," Jessie said firmly.

"It won't harm him; and this is how it's made." She leaned forward and took the girl's hands in hers, and her breath struck coldly on Jessie's pale cheek as she whispered her instructions in her ear.

"It is horrid!" the girl said, with a shudder, when she had finished.

"Oh, well, if you are so mighty particular you can leave him to marry Fanny Lane."

"I won't!" Jessie said. "I'll do it." For Mother Murgatroyd had craftily mentioned the most detested of her rivals. She rose as she spoke, and drew the shawl round her face again. "And you will have the price when it falls due."

Good-bye." She went out into the dusk, and Mother Murgatroyd peered at her through the narrow window as she descended the hillside. "What fools girls are!" she said, with a husky laugh, and then she sat down by the fire and warmed her skinny hands at the blaze.

Five days afterwards David Dale came striding swiftly along the road from Nutford. The legacy had been paid at last, and he carried it, a solid load—though minus the lawyer's fees—in gold in his pockets. It had been his fancy to have it paid in gold. Banks were uncertain things, he said, and letters of credit conveyed nothing to his intelligence. If he had a fortune, he wanted to see it, realise it, feel it as a tangible burden. So the lawyers had paid him the money, with advice to be careful, and admonitions regarding the wisdom of depositing it in the bank.

"You may be robbed," they said warningly, as he was about to withdraw.

"Nobody about here would steal from David Dale," he answered confidently; "and there's no strange man that I'm afraid of single handed." So he came along the road with a light heart and a tangible weight in each coat pocket. That weight spoke to him of a pretty farmhouse framed in an orchard, fat cattle in sheds, and sleek horses nibbling at the hay in well-filled mangers, and beehives, and undulating cornfields, and a long succession of happy, prosperous years. He saw a woman's face by the cottage window, a woman's figure among the garden flower beds, but the face and figure were symbolical, for David had as yet no definite conceptions of any actual girl as his wife.

It was known in the neighbourhood that he would receive his fortune that day, and so there was nothing surprising in the sight of Jessie Trench standing by the gate as he came up the road.

"I wanted to be the first to wish you good luck," she said.

"Thank you, Jessie. I've got it all here—" he struck his coat pockets as he spoke. "It's an odd thing now to think of a man carrying a farm, and stock, and implements, and a house, and who knows what besides, at each side of him."

"It's a load, I've no doubt," Jessie answered, laughing constrainedly. "And you are tired with the weight of it, I am sure. Will you come in and sit awhile, and rest, and have a cup of tea?"

The sunlight fell full on her, and he noticed for the first time how pale she was.

"You look bad, Jessie," he said.

"It's the heat, I think," she answered, turning indoors as she spoke.

The kitchen looked peculiarly trim and neat, and the tea-table was laid as if on speculation.

"I don't suppose father will be home for an hour or more," Jessie said. She spoke with a certain accent of fatigue, and there was some nervous tension in her figure as she moved about her work. "But I don't suppose you will mind a cup of tea with me alone."

"Not at all, Jessie. It's not the first I've had, and I don't forget old kindnesses. But you've changed lately." Her heart had softened at his previous words, and for an instant her resolution failed her. Now she grew hard again.

"It's you that have changed before the voice of flatterers, and people that value you only for what you have," she said.

David sighed. Jessie was a dear girl, but she had odd views of people and of circumstances. To change the conversation he began speaking of his plans, and this subject was so interesting that he scarcely noticed how little reply it elicited. By-and-by the tea was made, and Jessie poured it out before she asked him to turn round that they might discuss it together.

"Uncommonly good tea," he said approvingly, as he drank a second and a third cup. Once again he said, "Jessie, you look really bad; I'm concerned about you."

At that Jessie burst into tears, and all David's efforts at consolation failed to comfort her. She only said once or twice, "Be thankful for your good luck, and of all things be thankful that you are a man," which enigmatic sentence set David pondering as he walked homeward.

Jessie went early to bed that night. She complained of headache, and said fretfully that she was tired of hearing of David Dale's prosperity.

But she lay awake almost all the night, and already she was tasting the bitterness of an accomplished deception. She had no doubt of the success that would attend Mother Murgatroyd's spell, but already she was saying in her heart, "His love will never be the same to me as if it had come of itself."

Jessie's father was a mason, earning good pay, and she enjoyed the independence peculiar to only daughters who manage the home. Her father was very fond of her, and that day at

breakfast he noticed that she was dull, and made various inquiries regarding her health and her occupations when he was from home, which rendered her a little impatient.

"I am well enough," she said fretfully. "I wish you would leave me alone."

After he had gone, the sunlight seemed to come into the house aggressively, and she closed the door impatiently, as if to shut it out, so that she did not see a figure that came unsteadily up the garden path, or hear anything until the door was burst roughly open. It was David Dale who stood on the threshold, his hair clinging damply to his forehead, his coat flung open as though something suffocated him.

"Jessie, Jessie," he said, and his voice had a dreadful intonation of hoarse despair, "I have lost the money!"

She had anticipated something so much worse that for the moment this was almost a relief.

"Lost it?" she cried tremulously. "Tell me how!"

"I don't know how. I believe I hid it. I meant to hide it till the farm was purchased. I thought of twenty spots where I could hide it about the place; but I don't remember whether I hid it at all or not. I don't remember anything since I spoke to you yesterday. I remember the last thing you said, that it was fortunate to be a man, and I remember going down the road, and after that it is all a blank till I missed the money this morning when I woke"

"Did you look everywhere?" Jessie asked, with stiff, cold lips.

"Everywhere. I have turned the house upside down, I have examined every recently touched spot in the garden, I have had my fingers in every cranny in the walls, and it is gone, Jessie, it is gone!"

"You must let the police know," she whispered; but before her sentence was concluded David had fled, to accost the next person he met and to narrate afresh the story of his misfortune.

When the matter became accredited, the neighbours turned out in a body to search every foot of the way David had traversed on the previous evening.

They lifted every board and tile in his house, they dug the garden three feet deep from end to end; they offered rewards to a third of its value for tidings of the missing treasure; but David Dale's fortune was never recovered. The money had vanished like fairy gold; but what was far worse, his contentment, his easy philosophy, and such intelligence as he had possessed, had vanished with it. To repeat the story of his acquisition of wealth and its loss to everyone he met became the burden of David's life, till people grew impatient of it, and slipped out of the way to avoid him. There was talk after a year or two of sending him to the workhouse, he had become such a helpless, distracted, poor creature. Then Jessie Trench went to the house he occupied and led him out by the hand. "He shall live with us," she said.

The case was reported by the neighbouring press, and some of the medical publications took hold of it, and two eminent doctors found it sufficiently interesting to induce them to visit the village and David Dale; and one said brain

trouble was not infrequent after a sudden access of fortune, and the other said it was very unusual after such a lapse of time.

When old Peter Trench died, and Jessie was left alone with poor David Dale, one and another discussed the propriety of their continuing to live together, and one amiable old woman, with the best possible intentions, suggested to Jessie that it might be expedient to marry David if she intended always to support him; whereat Jessie burst into a sudden storm of tears that effectually frightened her interlocutor and everyone else from ever broaching the subject again.

About four years after Peter Trench's death a very curious thing happened. Mother Murgatroyd was found sitting dead in her chair, with the black cat crouching at her feet, and on the table was a sheet of paper on which were traced, in irregular capital letters, the words,—

"I want all I die possessed of to go to Jessie Trench for the maintaining of David Dale."

"All she died possessed of, the poor creature!" one and another said, thinking of that mysterious white half-crown; but when examination was made, over eleven hundred pounds in gold were found stuffed into her bedding and secreted here and there about the house.

Of course, the will was not a legal document, but the local authorities decided to treat it as legal, and to carry out its behest; all of which set talk rife again and the people wondering if Mother Murgatroyd was responsible for David Dale's loss and insanity. But Jessie never admitted that to anyone, or even to her own heart. The fault was all hers, she thinks; and some-

times when David and she are alone together she kneels at his feet and says, "Forgive me," to which he invariably answers, stroking her abased grey head, "Ay surely, ay surely, good friend."

HER SOLE INVESTMENT

CHAPTER I

"GOOD-BYE, Miss Griffiths, I hope you will have pleasant holidays."

At the word "holidays" Miss Griffiths' thin mouth relaxed into a smile, and, for the first time in many months, a flush of pleasure rose in her cheeks.

"Thank you; I am always glad to be free," she answered, with a momentary expansion of her narrow chest, and then she said good-bye hurriedly, and went out into the glaring heat of the burning sun, walking with an eager, tense erectness that sat oddly on her spare frame.

Mrs Sotheby looked after her with a smile of good-natured compassion.

"How queer she is, and how badly she dresses; worse than any of my servants," she said to herself; and then, without a thought that she was in anywise responsible for her governess's toilet, Mrs Sotheby dismissed her from her mind.

Miss Griffiths went down the street towards her poor lodgings, indifferent to what they thought of her in the big stuccoed house she had left. She was free now. She was her own mistress. For six long weeks no pupil could mimic her, nickname her, torment her,

and no employer could patronise or condescend to her. She was free and independent—as independent as the fashionable ladies sweeping past her in their luxurious carriages, and powdering her with the dust from their flashing wheels.

To be at rest, to have peace and immunity from toil, and freedom of thought and action for a time, why, it was happiness; it was a triumph and reward almost worth the unflagging toil of the past ten months.

Miss Griffiths had been trained in the hard school which inculcates the necessity of gratitude for very small mercies, and as she hurried eastward, walking through the noisy, dusty, crowded streets, because her contentment gave her momentary immunity from fatigue, the elderly, jaded governess had the thought that comes to all of us now and then, when things are at their best—that is that after all we have a good deal to be thankful for.

Of course, the Sotheby children were tiresome and rude, and Mrs Sotheby was selfish and prosperous in an aggressive way; and Mrs Daly, who presided over Miss Griffiths' lodgings, was slatternly and dispirited, and the rooms she let throughout the year were dismal and dingy; but still, when you faced things cheerfully, they weren't really so very bad. At anyrate, Miss Griffiths was about to leave all unpleasantness behind for the present, and in her heart, pulsating to the unfamiliar emotion of gladness, she had not room for a murmur. She was going away for the holidays—going out of the heat and noise and glare away to the enjoyment of such sights and sounds as the rich grow weary of through repetition.

It was not often she dared permit herself to think of pleasant things, but for once desire and fruition could march hand in hand. She was going away out of the rush and bustle to find liberty and peace by the sea. Not the cockney sea of Margate or Gravesend, but the vast ocean stretching away in leagues of rippling lustre north and south, and breaking in waves of snow and crystal on an empty strand. Expressed simply, Miss Griffiths had taken lodging in a pretty cottage on the Cornish coast, and meant to spend her holidays with Mrs Dingle and Sailor Bob, her husband ; but no simple language could convey any idea of all the change signified to the plain-featured, overworked governess. Why, the very kitchen in that cottage was a sanctuary, with its oaken furniture and gleaming pewter, and white windows standing always open to the sea. When she thought of it, Miss Griffiths seemed to smell the salt breezes, to hear the voices of the sea birds, and to see the green and purple waters and the masses of heaving shoal. And then the clear-eyed old sailor and his silver-haired wife would like her, would defer to her, would take her little peculiarities as matters of course, tending towards her with a sympathy devoid of all condescension. What if the treat were costly, it would be worth its price—it would be something to look back on through the years in which she could permit herself no similar pleasure.

It was not often Miss Griffiths could allow herself any enjoyment ; indeed, she had a hard struggle to make ends meet, despite the annual hundred pounds which Mrs Sotheby paid her so grudgingly, for there was all the expense of her maintenance to be borne, and then there

was the heavy premium to the insurance company, who had undertaken to render her old age independent.

Till she was sixty the governess would have no rest from the labour that she performed honestly, though without love; but after she was sixty she would have freedom bought by the insurance money.

On the whole, life was not very bad, Miss Griffiths was thinking as she trudged home that sunny summer afternoon. If there was the daily toil, there was the quarterly recompense, and once in many years such a treat as her trip to Cornwall was possible. Involuntarily her hand closed over the cheque she held, and her chest rose with a half sigh. For once in a way, through much reassuring, she convinced herself she was happy.

Had anyone cared to investigate Miss Griffiths' habitual attitude of mind, he would unhesitatingly have pronounced her a pessimist; but then what was there in her experience to render her anything else? She was all alone in the world; no one loved her, she had no heritage but labour, and her youth was over; as a matter of fact, she knew she must have been young once, but she could not remember when, for she was old ever since she had been teaching, and she was teaching at twenty. Of course that was no one's fault, no one had meant any harm, only fate had foisted a sorry portion on her as her lot in life. But she did not complain; she had never felt so little like complaining as she did now when she entered her shabby sitting-room with the money, embodying her best imaginings, in her hand.

At first she did not notice that it was the land-

lady in person, and not the child slavey, who was busying herself with the cracked tea service, till Mrs Daly accosted her grumblingly,—

“Mary Ann has hurt her foot; I must wait on the lodgers myself till she is better.”

“Indeed!” The governess came back with a start from the world of her imaginings.

“Yes, and the doctor says she may be laid up for a month; but troubles never come alone. I thought I’d had my share, but it seems the Lord does not think so.” And here, to her lodger’s astonishment, Mrs Daly applied her black alpaca apron to her reddened eyes, and sat down to weep more at her ease.

“I hope there is nothing wrong.” Miss Griffiths spoke gently, but her momentary contentment was gone. The woman’s tears had thrown her back into her habitual consciousness of the universality of pain.

“Everything is wrong. Oh, how long life is when it is a burden, and I’ve tried so hard to do my best, but things have been too much for me since my man died. I’ve slaved late and early. I’ve wrought myself to skin and bone, and what does it come to?” she cried, looking at her lodger with fiery, rebellious eyes.

Miss Griffiths shook her head, that seeming the most comprehensive mode of offering sympathy.

“It means that my child and John Daly’s child is a thief.”

“Oh, Mrs Daly!”

“You know the child; you remember the night you gave him a penny because he read so well? I have kept him at school every day. Often I have paid for him with the very price

of my food, and half the time I daresay he was deceiving me, scheming and staying away to idle about the streets," she murmured, rocking herself heart-brokenly to and fro as she spoke.

"Many children hate school and play truant," the governess ventured apologetically.

"But that is not the worst of it. Three days ago a policeman that I knew—he was from my own place in the country years ago—found him stealing, and brought him home to me. Only that he was my son he would have sent him to the treadmill, he said."

"That is very bad indeed, Mrs Daly. But this lesson may keep the child straight for the future, and after all it was only once."

"Unfortunately it wasn't only once, for I found, in the box under his bed, fruit and toys and candies, that he must either have stolen or stolen the price of. You have never missed any money, have you?" Her wet eyes sought Miss Griffiths' face, and her words were broken by a sob.

"Oh, no, indeed, I never have; but how dreadful for you, Mrs Daly, and he such a bright, pretty little fellow, too!"

"Yes, and so like his father, only that his father was honest. Well, Heaven knows it's not my fault that Willie is a thief. But to think, Miss Griffiths, that only a few pounds might save him yet, and that I cannot raise the money; it is that that breaks my heart!"

"What do you mean?"

"The Prestons are going out to Canada, to farm life there, and for twenty pounds John Preston would take Willie with him, and keep him till he found a fitting situation for him. He could not do it for less, for he is poor and

has many children; but all I own in the world would not raise that sum."

"And what good would that do?"

"It would take him away from bad company—it would save him."

Jane Griffiths' thin hand closed on the cheque lying in her lap. What right had this strange woman to come to her with her personal troubles, and lay claim to her little all?

"I don't think I can help you," she said, speaking shrilly and rebelliously.

"Oh, no, I never thought you could, but it eases one's heart a little to tell one's sorrows."

"I am a working woman. I have nothing but what I earn," she said argumentatively. "If I were rich I should be very happy to help you. But is there no one who knew you long ago who would advance you this money on trust?" Miss Griffiths' tone became more cheerful as she pushed the responsibility from herself on to other imaginary shoulders.

"People love you well before they will lend you money," Mrs Daly answered, with a head-shake. "But don't you fret about it, miss, you have your own troubles, and I suppose I must have deserved this somehow, or it would not have been sent."

She rubbed her fretted eyes again with the stiff apron, and then, with pretended haste and alacrity, withdrew.

Miss Griffiths drew the shabby teapot towards her, and poured the black contents into her cracked teacup; but the decoction was bitter as gall to her tongue, and the hard bread and rancid butter stuck in her throat. Mrs Daly needed twenty pounds, and twenty pounds was the whole of Miss Griffiths' treasure. Giving it

up meant spending her holidays within Mrs Daly's grimy, spotted walls, meant hearing the din of vehicles and breathing the dust of the streets through hot July and broiling August, meant shutting the doors of memory against that long-cherished dream of rest. Miss Griffiths dwelt on each item of her loss separately, picking them out as aggravations of her sacrifice. Mrs Daly was nothing to her, her child she had scarcely seen, and yet for their sakes she must abandon the one piece of comfort that was about to find its way into her laborious year. Yes, she must do it, there was no question about it; indeed, it did not matter whether or not she went to the Dingles, the whole thing was spoiled; there would be no light on the sea, no music in the waves, no sweetness in the briny breezes, if the thought of Willie Daly on the treadmill intruded on her hourly, as she knew it would. But what right had anyone to offer her this picture, what right had these people and their concerns to enter between her and her well-merited rest?

She was righteously wroth as she rose from her meagre tea and swept down the narrow, dingy stairs into the dismal underground kitchen, where Mrs Daly, by the light of the dim, grated window, was washing up the teacups of the other lodgers, while a small boy in an attitude of abject misery and self-abasement cowered over the handful of embers smouldering in the fire-place.

Miss Griffiths did not penetrate into the shabby interior, she stood on the threshold, holding her limp skirts in her hand.

"I came to say I can give you that money," she said, speaking in a high, querulous voice. "I

meant it for my holiday trip ; it is all I have, but you can have it. I suppose your need is greater than mine."

She lingered just long enough to hear that Mrs Daly was thanking her effusively, not declining her offer as she had half hoped, then she turned impatiently and went back hastily to the dismal loneliness of her own apartment ; and there her self-control gave way, and hiding her pale face in her thin hands, she wept, not for her lost holidays only, but for her lonely life, her forgotten youth, her loveless, hopeless, toiled-filled maturity.

CHAPTER II

It was Christmas all over the world ; Christmas as he has been besung, besonnetted, and belaboured too, till there is nothing now to be said about him, good or bad. In country places he was picturesque as ever, where the fields slept under unbroken snow, and yellow fires looked out brightly through wide windows beneath icicle-fringed eaves, but in towns all the beauty had been trodden out of him, and he seemed to hide his face and deny his existence in the raw, chill atmosphere of the sloppy streets.

"What odious weather!" a pale lady said, with a little shiver, as she drew a woollen shawl closer around her throat and nestled more comfortably in the chintz-covered chair that was drawn up as closely as the regulations of the establishment permitted to the fitfully blazing fire.

It was the drawing-room of the Governesses' Beneficent Home, 19 Harding Street, in which twenty persons, of various ages and of the female sex, were seated in a great many attitudes of un-at-homeness on the afternoon of the Christmas eve in question; a room supplied with all the essentials of furniture in the shape of tables, chairs, and a piano, but without a picture, an album, a scrap of needlework, or other personal belonging to individualise it.

"Have you finished with the *Times* now, Miss Small?" a well-grown, buxom, shabbily-clothed young woman asked of the lady by the fire. It may here be mentioned that the only portion of the great daily studied in the establishment was one particular column in one of the advertisement sheets, where heads of families made known their requirements in the educational line.

"Not yet, Miss Goodson." Miss Small's hand closed determinedly on the sheet again, and her bright little eyes looked round the room with a gleam of malice in them.

"It does not seem fair for you to keep it all day," Miss Goodson rejoined, grumbling.

"There is nothing here would suit you."

"How do you know what would suit me?"

"Ladies, you would all have a much better time if you agreed not to quarrel," a rosy girl, who was writing by the table, looked up to say with good-humoured condescension.

"Quarrel! Who is quarrelling? One can't raise the caloric sufficiently for that, I assure you. How I do wish that I dared poke that big, black, smouldering mountain of coal into a roaring blaze."

"Well, do poke it, perhaps it won't be found

out, and if it is we won't tell who did it," the girl said encouragingly.

"As if that mattered. Why, they have eyes here in their back hair and in their heels, and in every unexpected place—at least she has."

"Oh, she isn't so bad, you can get on with her if you take the right way of her," a fourth interposed soothingly.

"You can, because you only come here for holidays, and don't care a bit whether you come at all or not; but for my part I hate her awfully. I wish it was not a sin to put pins in her tea, or arsenic in her soup, so that the home might have another superintendent."

"Oh, do not talk so much," came entreatingly from the table. "I cannot write with so much chattering going on, and my letter is so important."

"Is it an application?"

"No, better than that, accepting a situation."

"Ladies, silence, please. Miss Snagsby is accepting her first situation. Pile on your own virtues now, Miss Snagsby, for you will never be allowed to hold them in esteem again."

"That is only the fashionable sentiment here; lots of us fare very well, and know we do, too."

"Of course, and all of us who live with titled ladies, have a little patrimony of our own, and wear an engagement ring, ought to find ourselves very comfortable; at least I think so, Miss Shipton."

Miss Shipton smiled; she was a tall, well-grown woman of three-and-thirty, with a deep voice and a certain masculinity of aspect that went oddly enough with her childlike candour in the matter of her own love affair.

"An engagement ring isn't much; you might

all have one if you wished." She looked down with a smile on the little pearl ring on her finger as she spoke.

"I mightn't; I've tried it valorously during the two-and-twenty years of my life, and I've never had an offer of any consequence yet."

It was an extremely pretty girl who spoke, the only beauty in the room.

"Do tell us how you managed, Miss Shipton, and does the mode of procedure vary when you are making up to sons of the house or friends of the family?"

One or two of the listeners laughed, but she who had been seated by the window in silence hitherto rose impatiently, and with a muttered exclamation regarding silly conversation, hurried out of the room and up the carpetless stairs, and into the corner of the divided chamber that she called her apartment.

"What are Miss Griffiths' matrimonial chances?" Miss Aston inquired with grave interest, whereat the first thing like an unanimous laugh echoed in the drawing-room that day.

Meantime Miss Griffiths had flung herself on her hard little bed with an unconfessed feeling of resentment against the happier women she had left behind her. How could they be so light and unconcerned when they were all hurrying towards a destiny as evil as her own? It was nearly thirty years now since she had given her cheque to Mrs Daly, and from then till the present no solitary gleam of good fortune had ever come her way. She had spent her holidays in the dingy apartments that looked like a vulgar prison to her, and so had ruined the strength and courage needed for her winter labours. And

then an unconscious air of martyrdom, dating from the hour of her grand sacrifice, had hung about her continually, offending Mrs Sotheby, who considered it directed against herself, and so, after small misunderstandings that ran through all the winter term, Miss Griffiths and her employer agreed to part. Of course she found another situation, but more laborious and more remote, and Mrs Sotheby found another governess, but at a higher salary, so neither profited by the exchange. And then, after a time, she left Mrs Daly's apartments, not having the heart to withhold her weekly payments till the loan was made up, as had been the understanding at first. The daily governess sympathised with poverty, as only the poor can, so she moved on—she had been moving on all her life.

Then after a year or two she fell ill, and employment grew more precarious, and the subscription to the insurance company lapsed, and so the hope of an independent old age—that was all the hope she had ever had—was ended. She was over sixty now, and her accomplishments were old-fashioned like herself, and her temper was soured, and the few pounds she had been able to save at intervals were spent in waiting for someone needing her services, and no one needed them. She was out of the running where the race is to the swift.

She had flung herself on her little bed, and had drawn her fur-lined cloak over her cold feet, and, with her hands pressed on her aching eyeballs, was laboriously trying not to think.

She was as unpopular at 19 Harding Street as she had been elsewhere; no one took to her, no young governess asked her advice, no older one claimed her sympathy. At night, on both

sides, she would hear her neighbours telling their experiences, chatting to each other across their wooden partitions till the rules enjoined silence, but no remark beyond a civil good-night was ever addressed to her. She did not care for any of them, and yet she fancied sometimes, in her softer moods, that some of them would be sorry if they knew that only three pounds stood between her and destitution, that, in four more weeks, if she had not found a situation meantime, she had literally no prospect but the work-house.

She knew there were homes for needy gentlewomen somewhere, but she also knew that they were beyond her reach, just as she had known once that there must be means of recovering the money she had paid into the insurance company, though the money was quite lost to her.

These thoughts made her colder, and she was shivering as she lay on her bed, rubbing her chill hands together. She was quite aware that she was breaking a rule of the Home in retiring to the dormitory during the day, but she preferred the risk of a reprimand to the conversation going on below. Miss Griffiths had not yet reached that height of sympathy when she could take pleasure in every relaxation of her neighbours, and there never had been any period in her life when frivolous talk would have afforded her any gratification. Miss Griffiths was a little bitter against destiny when she looked back on her career, for, on the whole, she had deserved better than many, and she was so unfortunate.

She took out her purse and looked into it again. There were the three sovereigns as she had seen them ten times that day ; three sovereigns that would pay for her board for three

weeks and for the other necessary items of expenditure. There was her laundry, and the expected fee to the servants, and a cab would be necessary to take her away from Harding Street, to a situation, or to the workhouse. She thought of that home of the indigent without a smile ; there was no suggestion of the ludicrous in it to her. It was the end of all her labours, in spite of herself. She had striven for independence all her life, as others strive for wealth and fame, and she had been beaten ; she must therefore accept the consequence of defeat. And then she fell to idly wondering how the workhouse could be reached, for she knew there were difficulties barring even those portals. She must go to the workhouse belonging to her own parish, but which was her parish ? She did not know. She had been itinerating all her life. She belonged to no place and to no person.

"If I could only die now, the three pounds would bury me," she thought, striving still towards independence, and then her thoughts went back tiredly to the little lodging in Putney that made all the home she had ever known, and to the old minister and his wife, that were dust and ashes for nearly half a century ; but she did not think of them with any tenderness ; they had laid the burden of existence on her, that was all they had ever done for her. Were they conscious of the bitterness of that burden now in heaven, she wondered, and would they meet her with any self-reproach when she too entered the golden gates ? It was hard for her to fancy herself in heaven, hard to fancy herself in any place of ease and rest ; but then heaven had been promised to her, not because of any merit in her, but because she was weary and heavy

laden. She had no anxiety about heaven ; it did not come within her province, and she left it so.

"Oh, you're there, Miss Griffiths, I thought you had gone out." The rosy girl who was seeking an engagement had entered her neighbour's loose box on a promiscuous hunt for something, and had been startled almost into a shriek by the pallid face and wide-open eyes fronting her.

"No, I haven't been out to day."

"Are you ill?"

"No, thank you,"—the sallow countenance was turned impatiently away—"only tired of the unending chatter downstairs."

"Chatter? I think the place as quiet as a churchyard." Miss Goodson was moved by a faint sense of affront as she withdrew into her own compartment, but being possessed of that inestimable quality for a start in life, a good temper, she recovered after a moment's huffy adornment of her person.

"I suppose you know it is wiser to be in the drawing-room during office hours?" she ventured hesitatingly.

"Why?" The interrogation came quite sharply through the wooden partition.

"In case you are wanted. You know no one is looked for elsewhere."

"I am never wanted."

"But a person of your requirements might be."

"Then there are plenty below who have them and more. I don't suppose I was urgently demanded to-day," grimly.

"No, this was a bad day ; there was no one here but a lady wanting a nursery governess."

"And did she find one?"

"No, we are all too advanced and expensive."

"And has the lady gone?" Miss Griffiths started up so suddenly that she brought her neuralgic pain back again.

"No; but it's a nursery governess she wants, four children to wash and dress, for a salary of twenty pounds. Surely you would not think of it," Miss Goodson urged distressfully.

"I have no money. I must take what I can get," was the husky answer. She did not stop to brush her hair or smooth her rumpled collar, or change the bedroom slippers that were one of her few comforts. She was thinking eagerly, "Perhaps I am not too old-fashioned for this."

"Has the lady gone?" She stopped as she passed the drawing-room door to put this question.

"What lady?" Miss White asked with a languid lifting of her pink eyelids.

"The lady who wanted a nursery governess."

"She's in the office, I think."

Miss Griffiths flew on, the desperate hope of gaining this prize—think of it, educated women of England—having set her quivering like a young girl.

She went up to the office door eagerly, but stopped there. Miss Worrit, the superintendent, was inside, and her thin tones were falling like icedrops on the still air,—

"I am sorry; most of our ladies at present are finishing governesses; but after the New Year we may be able to suit you."

"Thanks, I shall not trouble you, elsewhere I daresay I shall find someone not too grand for my requirements." The stranger was piqued, and spoke with an offended American accent as she came forth from the dingy office.

"I beg your pardon, but I came to say that I would not mind being a nursery governess," Miss Griffiths broke in hurriedly, "I — I understand children, and the salary would not matter — and — I've been a finishing governess."

There was poignant anxiety in every tone of the eager voice, in the clasp of the pale hands, in the forward curve of the long, stooping figure, but the strange lady was angry, and she only noticed the untidy hair, the old sickly face, and the obtrusive bedroom slippers.

"Oh, thank you, it is quite a common person I want," she answered, with a vicious little laugh, and tossed her golden head and passed on, followed by a middle-aged gentleman, who had been silent and passive during the whole interview.

"Miss Griffiths, how dare you?" Miss Worrit's vibrant voice broke in furiously.

The man started, and looked round from the doorstep, taking in at a glance the old, bent, dejected figure, the haggard, sallow face, and the drooping, hopeless attitude.

"Miss Griffiths, how dare you?"

The words seemed to hiss like the lash of a whip, stinging the hearer into momentary attention.

"I wanted to see the lady. I thought—"

"What business had you to think? Why were you not in the drawing-room when the

lady came? Where were you? Running after the agents and such people, I know."

"No, I wasn't; I was in the bedroom."

"And why were you in the bedroom? How dare you break the rules?"

Miss Griffith returned no answer.

"And then to disgrace the Home by appearing so, with such hair and such slippers, and such an aspect altogether. No lady would be capable of such conduct; but I always knew you were not a lady." This was the deadliest shot that Miss Worrit kept in her locker, and she was wont to fire it unsparingly; but for once it failed in effect. Miss Griffiths did not care what opinion Miss Worrit held of her gentility. "And I would further add," the superintendent went on, while her ophidian head seemed to flatten itself out and her narrow eyes to lighten, "that those who infringe the rules must give up the advantages of the establishment. You can therefore be ready to leave on Saturday."

It may here be observed that Miss Worrit was the paid superintendent of the Beneficent Home, an establishment conducted on such tolerant principles that her own statement was the only account ever asked of her stewardship.

Conclusions are by no means commensurate with their cause at certain times. As Miss Griffiths went upstairs, with the knowledge that her last chance of employment was over, before it had been followed to the bitter end, she said to herself, dully,—

"I don't think there is any God."

She must leave on Saturday, and it was Thursday now; she had therefore one day in which to look out for lodgings, one day in which to find a landlady whose yawning pockets would

swallow up her remaining coins and leave her penniless. She had her box to pack, and a portion of her week to pay for, and all the rest of the time to look out for a new abode.

She went upstairs and changed her obnoxious slippers, and restored her hair to its usual smoothness, and bathed her hot brow and icy hands, and then she came back to the drawing-room and sat by the draughty window, looking out stonily on the muddy street. In one day she would be gone from here, would have passed out of her old life for ever. And where could she go? What could she do? What would become of her?

She fell to idly speculating on herself as if she had been another person. She was very unfortunate; she did not think she had ever known anyone quite so unfortunate. But, after all, did this incident make things much worse than they had been? After all, was it necessary for her to look out for another residence, since her stay in it must be so brief? Would it not be better to leave 19 Harding Street and take her few possessions and go forth and sit on the pavement till a policeman took her up as a homeless person and solved her difficulty for her? She had no thought of revenge, she was too much beaten and disheartened for that; but in a vague way she thought it might benefit others if Miss Worrit's mode of procedure were examined into.

"If I am found homeless the case will come before the public, and then all who have complaints to make will take courage to say their say," she thought; "and what a blessing it would be for the old governesses if something was done to her!"

It was the first time in her life that the

thought of becoming a public benefactress had been possible to Miss Griffiths, and for the moment it lifted her above her personal sorrows. She drew closer to the fire, and interjected a remark or two into the general conversation, and was so bright and animated that several of the governesses opined that she had got the situation, and others wondered how she could demean herself to take it. During dinner she was quite cheerful, and after dinner she volunteered a little music on the old piano, drawing more sweetness from it than anyone had thought its thin strings capable of.

"The situation must be better than we thought, and she has got it," the governesses whispered to each other, but no one dared ask her, and Miss Griffiths volunteered no information. For that one evening she was allowed a spurious, feverish contentment, but in the night self-pity and despair laid hold on her again, exulting over her.

In the morning she rose, so ill and haggard that leave to rest on the hard little bed would have been a boon, but in the establishment illness was against the rules, and she was not in a position to ask or obtain a favour. She dressed herself languidly, was late for prayers, and had another reprimand, and then went back to the drawing-room and stared out with unseeing eyes at the deserted street.

It was Christmas Day, and she was wondering why she could not die, why she must drain the bitter cup of privation to its dregs, what she had ever done to deserve such special evil fortune.

"A visitor for Miss Griffiths." The porter's voice came chokily up the speaking-tube, and

Miss Griffiths started with a momentary thrill of astonishment and hope. Who could care to visit her? Who thought of her in all the wide world?

She went down the stairs dazedly, and into the chill drawing-room, and up towards the end window, in whose recess a man was sitting—a well-dressed gentleman, who rose at Miss Griffiths' approach, and held out his hand to her

"You don't know me," he said; "I am more changed in the time than you are. I knew you at a glance yesterday.

"No, I don't know you," she said slowly. "I suppose I taught your family some time, but I forget."

"No, you did not teach my family, but you rendered me a great service once."

"I? Oh, I think you mistake. I fear I never had it in my power to render a service to anyone."

"Yes you had, and you did it very generously too, and a very great service it was. I suppose you forget Willie Daly that you sent abroad?"

"And you are he?" She clasped her hands involuntarily as she looked at him.

"Yes, I am he; and I am very rich and prosperous, and honest too, and I owe it all to you."

"I am very glad—very glad," she drew a short breath as she spoke. If her life had been maimed and impotent, at least it had helped towards this man's development.

"And all these years I have remembered you," he said huskily. "Ever since I began to succeed I have laid aside a tenth of my profits as Miss Griffiths' share; it was only honest, only interest on your investment. I remembered how gener-

ously you gave, and how hard the giving was, and I have never forgotten that, under God, I owe everything to you."

The old governess had broken down, and was weeping bitterly.

"Your mother must be proud and happy," she said, with a sob.

"Mother died many, many years ago, but not before she knew I was likely to do well."

"And you knew me yesterday?" There was a sound of faint pride in her voice as she spoke.

"Oh, yes, the moment I looked at you. I have been seeking you for years. I would have advertised for you long ago, but for the weak fear of telling my wife all my history. She is an old Virginian, and proud and high in many ways, and I dreaded the effect of my disclosures on her. Besides, I did not know that you might not be rich and prosperous. But when I saw you and knew how things were with you I made up my mind to tell her the truth, and now she is as interested in you as I am. We came together to see you last night, but it was after hours, and we could not be admitted. And now we want you to come to our house this evening, and to stop with us till we decide about the future. There is an amount lodged at my banker's that will pay you two hundred a year, and it is not a tithe of all I owe you."

Miss Griffiths did not protest. She was too utterly thankful. The help was too direct and providential. She only said, deep down in her heart, "After all, there is a God."

There was an excitement in 19 Harding Street, such as its well-regulated interior had never known before, when a neat brougham and pair drove up for Miss Griffiths in the

evening, and the golden-haired lady came to lead her off in person.

"Then you have decided on Miss Griffiths, after all?" Miss Worrit asked, with a gleaming smile that showed all her incisors, whereupon the stranger twisted her neck, surveyed the superintendent from head to foot, and turned her back on her without answering.

It happened that Miss Slingsby was passing through the hall at that moment, and witnessed this cut direct, the news of which crept noiselessly upstairs, and was considered better than champagne at dinner-time.

It is needless to pursue Miss Griffiths' history further. She lives now in pretty apartments in Bloomsbury, and several children who call her auntie visit her periodically, and seem to love her, and to her own astonishment, Miss Griffiths finds that it is possible to regard children with interest and affection.

The income from her investment is her own absolutely, but, as she has no natural heirs, the probabilities are that her wealth will descend, on her demise, to William Daly, jun., who, after all, has probably a kind of right to it.

TOM'S OUTING

CHAPTER I

"It is a very forlorn sort of a world," said little Tom to himself, as he sat on the deserted beach of a fashionable watering-place, disconsolately watching an outgoing tide.

A superficial glance would not have confirmed Tom's judgment, for the world was making a most gallant show just then, with the superb sun high in the heavens, and the sea a tremulous field of azure and silver. Perhaps Tom made deductions from feelings rather than facts, as so many of us do. Certainly he looked forlorn enough himself, with a wisp of his dark hair protruding assertively from his torn straw hat, and the few marine objects he had thought worth collecting escaping from his soiled and tumbled pinafore.

At that moment it would have been difficult to guess that he was anybody's petted darling, or that the anxious interest of at least four persons centred in his small and dirty personality.

Until the last month of his brief life Tom had been an only child, and an only child with

half the globe between him and his parents too, but for all that he had been a very happy and very well-cared-for little fellow. He lived with an uncle and aunt in a big house in a Manchester suburb, where he had a large, airy nursery, and as many delightful things therein as the heart of a little boy could desire. And then everyone was very good to him; the servants were all his intimate personal friends; Uncle Teddy did exactly as Tom wished always; while, as regarded Aunt Maria, there certainly never had been anyone in the wide world like her. Tom thought her beautiful, so sweet and round and soft, and always dressed so that it was a treat to lay your cheek against her.

Now, young as Tom was, he had already discovered that people may be virtuous without being charming. There was Ellen, his nurse, who really had a great genius for story-telling, but Ellen's knuckles were dreadfully hard, and when she dressed or undressed him, her hands were always cold in the winter and hot in summer, when he would have liked them just the opposite. Now Aunt Maria's hands—oh, they were always right, and everything else about her.

There was one mystery that exercised Tom's imagination a good deal, namely, why Aunt Maria, who loved children, and was so good to him, had not any little boys and girls of her own.

Tom remembered consulting her on the point once, when she had come up in her soft, shining dinner dress, to wish him good-night. Aunt Maria had not answered him for a moment; first her cheeks grew very pink, like the geraniums in the window, and

the diamond star at her throat gave a quiver or two, and then she said,—

"I could not love any baby better than I love little Tom.

"But father and mother will come for me one day, and then what will you do?" Tom asked, not knowing he was cruel.

"Perhaps they will not take you from me," she said; and then she told Tom the great piece of news, how there was another tiny, tiny baby out in India, and that, perhaps, father and mother would come home that very year and bring the little brother with them.

At this astounding intelligence Tom said, "Oh-h-h!" his great eyes shining, and then he slid out of Aunt Maria's arms and raced round and round the room in sheer gladness of heart, his little bare feet twinkling in the firelight as he ran.

It was after this that Aunt Maria thought it might be wise to send away Ellen and get a young lady to look after Tom.

"She will teach you nice manners, and I hope you will do exactly as she tells you, so as to be a perfect little gentleman when father returns."

Tom felt that he would like to be a perfect gentleman before that delightful event, and so, with some tears, he resigned himself to part from Ellen and to accept Miss Kenwick in her place.

Tom thought Miss Kenwick lovely when he saw her, and he put his finger into his mouth in an access of admiration.

"Take your finger out of your mouth and say 'How do you do?' prettily," Miss Kenwick said.

Tom sighed, partly because he felt his educa-

tion had begun, and partly because Miss Kenwick's voice disappointed him. The tones were clear and thin, and Tom, who thought Aunt Maria's rather husky voice the perfection of articulation, was disappointed.

Until Miss Kenwick's advent Aunt Maria had thought Tom a very well-mannered baby, because he was loving and obedient, and naturally polite, but Miss Kenwick saw so much amiss, and spoke so disparagingly of the instructions of the departed Ellen, that Aunt Maria grew dreadfully ashamed.

"But he is such a little fellow," she pleaded deprecatingly—"not yet four years old."

"Lady Pratt always said that a child should be taught deportment from his very cradle," Miss Kenwick answered severely, and Aunt Maria collapsed.

Lady Pratt was Miss Kenwick's former employer; and, though her title was but that of the wife of a civic knight, it sounded just as magnificent as if she had been a countess, and acted powerfully for the suppression of Aunt Maria.

Miss Kenwick made Aunt Maria dreadfully uncomfortable. There are people who, without being consciously offensive, deprive your home in some subtle way of its perfect peace once they have come beneath its roof. But Aunt Maria did not hold Miss Kenwick responsible for this; since she had given Lady Pratt entire satisfaction for three years, it must be her own fault that she could not like her.

Aunt Maria was a soft, loving, motherly woman, who never struck anyone at an angle, perhaps because there were no angles about herself, and who made every spot she lived in

comfortable by the mere charm of her easy presence. Aunt Maria never fussed or scolded, never suppressed others, never obtruded herself; she was like a low-toned, big background for the drama of the lives of those who knew her. Lovers agreed to meet at Aunt Maria's house; friends who had fallen apart made their mutual complaints to her; and servants, who had neither a situation nor much of a character to fall back upon, often threw themselves on her mercy to get a fresh start. Unfortunately, it cannot be said that she was invariably well served or gratefully regarded in return, but she was one of those happily constituted people who do good-natured things to please themselves, and leave thanks quite out of their reckoning.

But though Aunt Maria knew she was popular, she knew also that where a competition in beauty or elegance arose she would be nowhere.

Now Bessie out in India was beautiful. Aunt Maria was the least envious woman in the world, but as often as she thought of Bessie, she sighed. Bessie, with her tall, slim figure, her soft, dark eyes, her ivory skin. Oh, yes! Bessie was beautiful, and so she had married Aunt Maria's only brother, and taken him away from the sister who thought there was no one like him in all the world, not even her own husband, who was so good, and whom she loved with her whole heart.

Aunt Maria was a little afraid of the beautiful Bessie, who was so well connected and so accomplished, and, therefore, when Miss Kenwick said, "Tom has not been nicely trained, and his mother is sure to think so," Aunt Maria quailed. If Miss Kenwick, who had lived with Lady Pratt and the rest of the aristocracy, thought Tom

vulgar, then of course he was vulgar, and what would his mother say when she saw him?

Aunt Maria went up to the nursery with a sinking heart—the big, airy nursery, that had Indian photographs on the walls and Indian toys strewn the floor; and there was the grey parrot, screaming objurgations at Tom, and Tom, astride his rocking-horse, brandishing his tin sword, and shouting at the horse and the parrot equally.

Aunt Maria saw how beautiful the child was, with a red glow in his dusky cheeks, and his thick, dark curls tossed back from his forehead; but she felt at the same time that he was dreadfully noisy, and so, perhaps, if noise be vulgar, Miss Kenwick was right.

For her own part she could not feel as if the child's faults were faults, and, therefore, she could not pretend to sit in judgment. She took him off the rocking-horse and kissed him, and when he got astride her knee and continued his equestrianism, she could only sigh and smile together. Perhaps it was fortunate after all that she had no children of her own, or she might have spoiled them, as Miss Kenwick said she was spoiling little Tom.

Aunt Maria could deny herself; she was a brave woman where it was necessary; and so, when Miss Kenwick said that Tom was not improving because he knew he had always his aunt to appeal to, Aunt Maria made up her mind.

"If you think he would do better under your sole care, I shall send you both to the sea-side for three months," she said. "I am very anxious that his mother should be pleased with him when she sees him."

Miss Kenwick demurred a little. There are people whose instinct is always to say "no" to any proposal; and others who, in minor matters, can never see any reason why they should not say "yes." The latter may be inferior disciplinarians, but certainly they make the more comfortable and successful wives and mothers.

Miss Kenwick believed that a too ready assent would be sure to invalidate her authority, and so she always said "no" at first, and thought herself very gracious if she reconsidered her decision.

Miss Kenwick declined the responsibility of Tom in the first instance, but admitted later that sea air would be likely to do him good.

"You must go where there is a safe strand," Aunt Maria said, her heart failing her a little. And Miss Kenwick conceded that point, after expressing some doubt as to whether a safe strand could be found in conjunction with a bracing atmosphere.

Aunt Maria was quite low-spirited that evening. She had Tom down for dessert, and cried a good deal over him furtively.

"Only that I believe it is for his good, I could not bear to let him go," she said.

"His good! Pooh! Nonsense! The child is all right," Uncle Edward answered, laughing. But then Uncle Edward was not afraid of Bessie, and thought his own wife as good and as nice as anyone.

"Miss Kenwick has been accustomed to nice children, and knows what is best for Tom, and I want him to please his mother."

"I think he is sure to please her."

"Miss Kenwick says, if she had him all to

herself, she could teach him to be a little gentleman."

"Miss Kenwick be hanged!" Uncle Edward said angrily. "An impertinent baggage!"

"An impertinent baggage," Tom echoed, emphatically and uncomprehendingly.

"Oh, Edward, you see!" poor Aunt Maria cried in terror; "if he said that before his mother, what would she think?" So it was decreed that Tom and the governess should take their departure coastwards forthwith.

Lykeham is a new-looking, beautifully clean town, with its best houses built in a long terrace facing the sea. It is an expensive town, too, in the season, and only well-to-do people can afford to patronise its hotels, or the commodious lodgings let by ladies who think themselves as good as anyone.

In the eyes of Aunt Maria and Uncle Edward it had two advantages. First, they had stopped there once or twice themselves, and knew how clean and healthy it was; secondly, it was within a reasonable distance of the Manchester suburb; and though Aunt Maria had no fixed idea of pouncing down on Miss Kenwick, nor any suspicion that an occasional visit might be of service to Tom, still it was well to have them within reasonable distance. As to expense, that was a matter of no importance whatever where Tom was concerned, and accordingly he and Miss Kenwick departed for Lykeham, and took up their quarters at the best and costliest hotel. Of course, Miss Kenwick meant to go into apartments ultimately, but in the first instance a hotel was convenient, and it was easy to direct her investigations thence.

For a day or two Tom thought everything

very satisfactory, for everyone took to him and praised him, and complimented Miss Kenwick so on his beauty that she seemed to think there was a little pride in owning him. Those were the days when he was dressed afresh for every meal, with the gayest of sashes and the costliest of garments, and when the ladies said, "Such a pet, and so foreign looking," and he strutted about in all the pride of his Oriental antecedents.

But that was before Miss Kenwick met her cousin.

Tom remembered the day the cousin came quite well. He had been down in the drawing-room, and the lady who had a room across the corridor from them had made Tom a present of a picture-book, and had been in the midst of an interesting narrative of a nephew, the age of Tom, who lived in London, when Miss Kenwick had come to take him away and dress him for going out.

She was carrying him down the landing, and he had one arm about her neck, while the other clasped his picture-book, when a gentleman, coming in the opposite direction, met them, and stood aside a little to let them pass. This gentleman wore clothes of a light colour, and he had a long, fair moustache, and little crinkly lines about his eyes; and when Miss Kenwick met his glance and blushed, and bowed slightly, he turned and stared after her, stroking his moustache in a bewildered way.

When they were out of doors they met the fair gentleman again; but Miss Kenwick pretended not to see him. Next day, Tom saw him talking to the governess, and after that, somehow, Miss Kenwick was always different from what she had been.

In the following week Tom and she went to the apartments that had been taken in Sea View Terrace; and then quite a different order of things began.

The fair gentleman called once, but he did not stay long nor take much notice of Tom; and, after that, Miss Kenwick made herself pretty every day, and kept Tom walking up and down, up and down the length of the terrace till he was weary.

Sometimes they met the fair gentleman, and sometimes they did not; and, when they met him, sometimes he stopped to speak and sometimes he only bowed. When he stopped, Miss Kenwick was amiable for all the rest of the evening; and when he only bowed, Miss Kenwick was cross, and sometimes slapped Tom, though he did not know why.

"What makes you always come out to meet the fair gentleman?" Tom asked once.

"I don't," Miss Kenwick answered, flushing; "and you are a rude boy."

"Why am I a rude boy?"

"To notice when I meet my cousin."

"Is he your cousin?"

"Of course he is."

"Is he not kind?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because you did not speak to him the first day you saw him."

Miss Kenwick told Tom he was tiresome and naughty, and took him home; and after that she always committed him to the care of Miss Parkinson, and went abroad alone.

Miss Parkinson was not very young. Tom thought she was very old, and once complimented her on all she must have seen; and

she wore voluminous draperies that rustled a good deal when she moved, and at the left side of her head she had a single long curl, which Tom thought very wonderful. She was a busy little woman, with as many duties in each day as could possibly be squeezed into it; but, for all that, she found time to pity little Tom.

"Poor forlorn child!" she used to say, when she found him shut into the back parlour, day after day, with the same wearisome box of bricks for his sole amusement, "if your people only knew!"

But they did not know, and it was not Miss Parkinson's business to tell them.

There were no children among Miss Parkinson's boarders at that time except Tom himself; but, pitying him as she did, the good little woman made it her business to seek out a former client, who lived further up the street now, and to introduce Tom.

"He is as good and nice a little fellow as ever was," she said, looking down on the child, who was resplendent in all the finery she could unearth for him, "and he is all alone here with a governess, who is young and giddy; and so I thought, as Miss Fanny is an only child too, that perhaps you would let her come and play with him sometimes."

Mrs Orpenshaw, a faded lady, who habitually wore easy-fitting garments, and lay on the sofa, signified her assent; and Miss Fanny, a precocious person of nine, who had been surveying Tom critically, and had discovered that his sash was an inch broader than her very best, and that his pelisse had the loveliest buttons on it that she had ever seen, Miss Fanny graciously signified that she would call for Tom sometimes,

and, as she kept her word, Tom's happy days returned.

CHAPTER II

THERE never was such a companion as Fanny. Tom would have maintained that against all comers; and even when she transferred her favours and cut him dead, he was too young and too honest to go back on his judgment.

It was hard that she preferred the big, freckled boy to him; but making a bad choice did not detract from her personal fascinations, and, however unkind she had proved, her favour had brought him one advantage—liberty.

He had got into the habit of meeting her on the beach, and as she always brought him home safely, Miss Parkinson relaxed her surveillance, so that he could take his hat unchallenged and go out alone.

At first, after Fanny's estrangement, he had found it good enough fun to sit and watch how the fickle fair one comported herself with his rival; but when the games they played were full of laughter, he found their nearness tantalising. To see nice things and never to share them, to hear mirth without ever making it, would test the resolution of a more advanced philosopher than baby Tom. For his part, he was learning to think that the world was not such a very nice place as he had fancied.

He would have liked to play with other children, if only to show Fanny that he did not miss her so very much; but he was such a baby, and so forsaken-looking, that no one encouraged his advances.

So he lay on the beach, thinking about nothing in particular, and there was a pain at his heart. On an impulse, he had taken off his shoes and stockings, thinking to paddle in the surf, but his attention had been diverted, and before he thought of the matter again, the sea had receded so far, and had left such a multitude of wrinkles on the sand, that Tom determined not to follow it. He tried to think of India, but he could not remember what to think about it; and then of Aunt Maria. Ah! it was easy enough to think of her. Tom felt he had so much to say to her that he was sure he could write her a letter. He could get a sheet of paper and a pen from Miss Parkinson, and he would say, "I love you, I love you," so often to himself, as he wrote, that his meaning would be sure to spread itself all over the paper. And then Miss Parkinson would address the letter for him, and see that it went all right. Miss Parkinson was very kind.

Armed with this resolution, he rose to go home, seeking his belongings first of all; but do as he would, he could only find one shoe and one stocking. The others had disappeared, swallowed up by the sand, perhaps, lost at any rate.

Tom was a very just little fellow, and what remained to him he resolved to divide fairly, so he put a stocking on one foot and a shoe on the other, and started homeward valiantly. But the way seemed unusually long, and the shoeless foot came in contact with many painful things, and the world seemed a more comfortable place than ever.

It was not any particular love for Miss Kenwick, but just relief at sight of any face

he knew, that made him rush towards the governess, and throw his arms round her, and hide his hot little face in her crisp skirts.

Miss Kenwick was charmingly dressed, and was looking very happy and very sweet, for she had just caught sight of the blond gentleman in the distance, and he seemed coming towards her, when lo! all her pleasant fancies were banished and herself rendered ridiculous by the advent of a dilapidated and dirty child, who took possession of her.

Miss Kenwick was wroth, but had to make the best of her trying circumstances by turning homeward, and telling Tom to follow her slowly.

"How came you in such a plight?" she asked, shaking her pupil, when he and she were within doors. "I thought you always went with Fanny Orpenshaw; and she is a nice little girl, and would never lead you into such a state."

"Fanny does not play with me now."

"And no wonder, you dirty boy."

"I wasn't dirty when I played with her—'t isn't that."

"Then what is it?"

"Fanny says my papa is not a gentleman."

"What does she know about your papa, I should like to know?"

"I told her papa was a civil servant out in India, and then she would not play with me. She said her mamma would not allow her to know a servant's child."

"Just as if she could know what the Civil Service is, and her father an upholsterer!" Miss Kenwick said, turning up her nose at the whole family of Orpenshaw.

"She said he was less of a gentleman for being civil; if he had been a rude servant it would have shown he did not like it."

"Impertinent little goose!"

"Impertinent baggage," Tom amended sapiently.

"That is a naughty word; where did you hear it?"

"From Uncle Teddy. Uncle Teddy said you were an impertinent baggage."

"He did!" Miss Kenwick was deeply wounded. She had been growing valorous in Tom's behalf, had been putting herself on the side of her pupil's family, and against all slanderers, and this was her reward! She grew crimson, and tears of mortification sprang into her eyes.

"I suppose we cannot expect better when we are dependent and defenceless," she said, more to herself than to Tom. "But it is rudeness like that that makes one so grateful for courtesy."

She did not go out that evening, but she did not play with Tom or notice him, only sat gazing despondently from the window, and that was not much more cheerful than solitude.

Miss Kenwick had fallen in love, deeply and hopelessly, and certainly without much undue encouragement. On the occasion when she told Tom that the blond gentleman was her cousin, it is to be feared she was not absolutely veracious, for he was no less a person than the Honourable Bertie Hunter, son of the late Lord Glenlyon, and brother of a live earl. It had been the Honourable Bertie's whim once to be on visiting terms at the house of Sir Giles Pratt, and there he had seen Miss Kenwick, and had been civil

to her, as it was his way to be to every woman under the sun.

The Honourable Bertie was very handsome, and very good natured, and honest and upright, according to his lights; indeed, neither friends nor foes, had he possessed the latter, could have found a fault in him, save that one of which he was himself so overwhelmingly conscious—his impecuniosity.

And the worst of it was that his facilities for curing himself of the latter disease were so very limited. He was not in trade, and so could not make any grand coup; he had no capital wherewith to speculate and make or lose a fortune on the Stock Exchange. England does not offer a man a chance of unearthing monstrous nuggets or big diamonds haphazard, and so the Honourable Bertie had but a solitary occasion of bettering his condition, namely, matrimony. That he would throw that away was a possibility that had never suggested itself to him; but as a fixed resolution regarding the disposal of his person does not deprive a man of soft blue eyes, a charming manner and a general desire to make himself agreeable, it had happened half a dozen times already that the Honourable Bertie had wrought havoc in the female breast which he neither desired nor intended.

The Honourable Bertie's affections were not at this time verbally disposed of, but to a certain extent they were out of his own keeping.

When an impecunious gentleman fixes his desires on a lady with a large income, onlookers are wont to surmise that her golden attraction is the most powerful one, but in Bertie Hunter's case this surmise would have been incorrect. Certainly, had Miss Bonanza been penniless, it

would have been impossible for him to have wooed her, however dear and desirable she seemed; but having a million dollars in her own right hampered him just as much on the other side. He honestly loved her, and though the money in itself might not be a disadvantage, he realised very well how materially it narrowed his chances. She was not a fool, and Miss Bonanza being a great heiress would likely find a worthier suitor, though not one who would love her more, of that he was morally certain.

As yet he had not uttered the momentous question, but he had done everything short of that, and on the whole he was not unhopeful. Pending further developments, he had come to Lykeham to rest and recruit his energies. And this was the man whom Miss Kenwick was breaking her heart about, and squandering even her self-respect to fascinate.

The Honourable Bertie was not blind to Miss Kenwick's state of mind, but he was neither flattered nor amused by it. It was not his fault that he looked admiring where he felt no particular admiration, and sometimes he regarded his beauty as a misfortune. Certainly, if it invited the tenderness of every girl that he dined with at a table d'hôte, it was a thorough nuisance.

If Miss Kenwick had belonged to his own particular world, he would have felt no compunction in snubbing her periodically, but in the case of a poor little governess the thing was impossible. So he had called on her when she asked him; was invariably courteous to her when she intercepted him in the street, and acquired, with a daily increasing sense

of discomfort, the consciousness that she was rendering him ridiculous.

But in a general way, men are very patient with the women who persist in admiring them. That Mr Hunter bore himself with unvarying severity towards Miss Kenwick cannot be said, and so the little governess, who had thought Lady Pratt a very good sort of a lady, infatuated herself more and more for the son of an earl. If she could ever write herself, "The Honourable Mrs Hunter," what would Lady Pratt and Tom's Uncle Teddy say?

CHAPTER III

SINCE Fanny Orpenshaw's defection, the beach had become forbidden ground to little Tom, who, shut up in Miss Parkinson's back parlour, because its ground floor windows were so safe, felt his heart ache daily with loneliness and misery.

Since there was never anyone to see him, there was no good in dressing him up, and so his pretty things lay safely in the bedroom drawers, and his brown holland pinafores did him all day long. Often, towards night, those pinafores grew sadly dingy; but no one noticed them or cared.

Did Miss Kenwick know she was neglecting him shamefully and betraying trust? Of course she did, and repented it, and meant to amend. Once she had gained the one thing she coveted, she meant to be good for the term of her natural life. Miss Kenwick, like Becky Sharpe, thought it must be easy enough to be good when one is prospering and in an assured position.

It was such an ugly room, that back parlour of Miss Parkinson's, with a horrible paper on the walls—orange spots on a drab ground—and no pictures; with cut paper in the fireless grate, and sea shells on the mantelpiece, and nothing within the four walls that it was possible to play with but that eternal box of bricks, of which he was so weary. But Tom would not have told Miss Parkinson what he thought about it for the world; he knew it would hurt her, and she was very kind. Sometimes she took him into her bright little kitchen, and gave him tea with herself, and jam rolls and other dainties; and often she undressed him at night when Miss Kenwick stayed late on the pier; and though her hands were harder than Aunt Maria's, they were very tender.

But, of course, Miss Parkinson had not time for these little gracious services often, and so Tom, after a dreary day, would go uncomforted to bed.

How he wished that Miss Parkinson's back parlour had looked out on the beach, that he might have watched the promenaders on the pier, and the donkeys on the sands, and, perhaps, have caught a glimpse of the fickle Fanny and his freckled rival. It was very hard on little Tom, who loved the sea, and took an interest in all human creatures, to have no outlook but the backyard, with its clothes-line and great water-butt.

Tom was rather afraid of the water-butt, it took so many odd shapes, all of them so human and so ugly. Sometimes it was nothing but a gigantic head that grinned at him with a wide slit of a mouth; and again it was a bloated body, protuberant as that of a toad, mounted

on three spindle legs, each one seemingly determined to march off in a different direction. But, no matter what else varied, one thing was permanent—that was the way in which it fixed its nondescript eyes on Tom, and stared him out of countenance.

If Tom had had Fanny to play with, he would not have minded; in that case, he believed he could have fearlessly stared back at the truculent water-butt; but being a little, lonely, neglected child, shut up in a dismal room all by himself, the water-butt pervaded his whole universe and frightened him. Often he pulled down the window blind to shut it out, but it possessed that perverse peculiarity that it was only more assertively present when he had thought to exclude it—sometimes coming through the blind and sitting down in the hair-covered armchair, and droning sermons at Tom till he fell asleep.

He was sure the water-butt meant no harm, and so he did not like to complain of it; but once, when it had been most didactic, Tom spoke to Miss Kenwick. He did not like the water-butt; it had stupid ways, it talked and talked and never told him a story, or said anything interesting; and so he wished Miss Parkinson to tell it not to come into the sitting-room.

Miss Kenwick told him he had been dreaming, and made him swallow a nasty powder, and then took him out to the yard and made him feel the water-butt, that it was just of wood, and could not come into the sitting-room, or speak to him. And all the time that Miss Kenwick was talking and poking its rotund sides, the butt was winking at Tom with the

most grotesque and horrible affectation of a thoroughly good understanding.

That evening Miss Kenwick dressed Tom and took him to walk on the pier, and kept him there till long after sunset, and then they walked home again, past the best hotel, and saw the blond gentleman and a friend dining by themselves in a private sitting-room. Tom wondered why they kept the blinds up and let people see them, but thought they must have forgotten the blinds behind the lace curtains.

"Is that other gentleman your cousin too?" Tom asked, after a little admiring study of the pair who lingered over their wine so comfortably; and Miss Kenwick said no, that she did not know the other gentleman.

"He is nice. Get your cousin to tell his name to-morrow," Tom suggested.

Here Miss Kenwick sighed, and said she did not know if she would see her cousin to-morrow, or ever again, and half wished she had never seen him.

Tom's head ached that night, and his throat pained him, but Miss Kenwick told him if he went to sleep he would be better in the morning. But next day he was not quite well, and so, as a special treat, Miss Parkinson let him into the front parlour.

But now that he looked out on the world again, it did not seem as pretty a world as he had fancied. The sun glared in a bold, angry way, and the voices of the children were loud and shrill, and the band of light, that he had used to fancy made a pathway of silver across the water out to India, dazzled him and made his head ache.

And then, suddenly, while he was wondering about all this, the door opened, and Fanny entered, in the crispest of gowns and newest of hats, and, rushing up to Tom, kissed him effusively.

She did not apologise for the past or allude to it, being perhaps too young to deem apology necessary.

Tom kissed her in return, but not from gladness, rather as a matter of courtesy; for the strange thing was that he was not glad to see Fanny, that he really did not care.

Even when she opened a deal box, redolent of pine wood and paint and glue and other delights, Tom could only rouse himself to a faint and fleeting interest in the farmyard she displayed, with its white fences and bright green trees, and neat red and white houses, and the rotund cattle that were numerous enough to crowd the enclosure, unless she gave them an outlet here and there.

This was Fanny's latest purchase, and, in a half-hearted way, she had intended it as a peace offering to Tom; but, since Tom did not care so very much about it, Fanny wisely resolved to reserve it for herself. What was the good of bestowing it on him if he was prepared to be friendly without it?

"You don't mind what I said about your papa?" Fanny ventured tentatively, as she prepared to withdraw.

"No, I don't mind, because I know my papa is a gentleman," Tom replied, with the calm of conviction.

"Yes, mamma says he is."

"Does she know my papa?"

"No; but she says a civil — you know"

(Fanny could not bring herself to utter the obnoxious word) "is nearly like an officer."

"Better than an officer," Tom said, with conviction.

"Then we are friends again?"

"Oh, yes; but the other boy?" Within the small limit of Tom's intense affections he could hardly realise how more than one friend was necessary.

"Oh, he is all right, but I like you better."

This was surprising; but what was still more surprising was that Tom did not seem to care. He was sitting on the floor with his back to the seat of the armchair, and by-and-by he slid out of this position and lay flat on the floor.

Then Fanny tip-toed her way out again, feeling very thankful that she had the farm-yard safe.

And Tom lay on the floor dozing, with the hot sun pouring in on his curly head. One cheek was flushed where the sun touched it, the other was deadly pale.

Out on the pier the band brayed in the most triumphant way, and up and down the esplanade cabs, folded back like landaus, bore loads of well-dressed people, who looked at each other with admiration or contempt. But Tom, to whom this would have all been high festival a week ago, kept his recumbent position, and noticed nothing, not even that a heavily-laden fly had stopped at Miss Parkinson's door, and that a gentleman in a light suit—a very big and brown gentleman—was helping two ladies to alight, and that the one lady was very slim and elegant, and the other very soft and placid and sweet.

When Miss Parkinson caught sight of the trio

on her doorstep her heart gave a bound. She had a premonition of what was coming, and was half gratified and half dismayed, so that her face was flushed, and her long curl quivering as she opened the door.

"We wish to see Master Tom Coventry," the brown gentleman said, and his voice was as pleasant as his face.

"Yes, sir. This way, sir." Miss Parkinson was dreadfully fluttered, though devoutly thankful that, for once, Tom was as neat as a new pin, and that she had the good luck to have him in the front sitting-room.

So she opened the door with quite a flourish, and showed the forlorn little fellow lying asleep in the sunshine.

"My baby, my dear, dear baby!" It was Aunt Maria's soft voice that was calling to him, and Aunt Maria's motherly arms that drew him to her breast, and Aunt Maria who was shedding tears of emotion over him.

And then the other beautiful lady went down on her knees beside him, and kissed his little hot hands, and pressed them to the velvet of her own cheeks, and murmured a number of inarticulate endearments over him, while the tall gentleman surveyed them all benignantly, and awaited his turn.

But they were all quick enough to discover that there was something the matter with Tom. He lay in his aunt's arms listlessly, stroking the soft fabric of her mantle, and seeming with difficulty to grasp the purport of the questions they asked him. And then one cheek was crimson, and the other very white, and the little hands, when they touched Aunt Maria's hands, were burning.

When Miss Kenwick was inquired for, Miss Parkinson answered that she had gone out to post a letter.

Of course Miss Parkinson knew that this was dreadfully untrue; but what can you do when you are cornered, and the difficulty is another's? Certainly the little woman had wished often enough that someone would turn up and "give it" to Miss Kenwick; but now that the desired incident seemed likely to occur, Miss Parkinson valorously interposed her veracity between punishment and the culprit.

For half an hour they awaited Miss Kenwick in vain, and then Tom's father went for a doctor. And when the doctor came he looked very grave, and said Tom was seriously ill. And Aunt Maria cried dreadfully, and the pretty mamma seemed to blame Aunt Maria somehow, though she did not say much.

When the doctor was going away, Mr Coventry followed him to the door and asked if Tom was in much danger; and the doctor said yes, but that young creatures were hard to kill, and he might pull through; and when the father went back to his wife and sister he spoke cheerfully to them, and neither of them knew what an awful kind of feeling was at his heart.

Meantime Miss Kenwick was atoning for all her sins, if they had only known it.

She had seen the Honourable Bertie drive off that morning, with a groom behind him; and now in the evening she took the way he had taken, in some vague hope that she might meet him and perhaps return with him. She had no object in seeking such an interview

beyond seeing him; but that seemed to her quite object enough.

And good or evil luck was on her side that time, for, two miles or thereabouts beyond the town, she saw him coming back, the sunlight on his handsome face, and the high wheels of the dogcart flashing forth rays of light from the cloud of dust they raised.

The Honourable Bertie was very happy. Things had gone well with him, and he felt himself the most fortunate man in the universe as he bowled along the level road that ran parallel with the sea. But suddenly his eyes lighted on Miss Kenwick, and then he was conscious of as distinct and disagreeable a sensation as though he had received a slap on the face.

The smile faded from his lips, and his voice was quite two tones deeper than usual as he spoke to the groom. "You can drive to the hotel; I shall walk back." Then he handed the reins to the man and alighted; though at that instant it would have been easier to have faced a platoon of musketry than to have done so.

Bertie Hunter was naturally as tender-hearted as a man could be, and just then his own happiness made him well disposed towards the whole world; yet here was a poor little woman whose worst offence, so far as he knew, was that she loved him, and she had that to hear, sooner or later, that would go far to break her heart.

"I saw you go away this morning," she said with a tremulous smile. "Have you had a happy day?"

"Most happy."

For all his efforts he could not keep out of

his voice the little thrill of rapture that memory awoke within him.

"You were with friends?"

"Yes."

"Dear friends?" she said, jealously jesting.

"As well now as later," he thought desperately. Then, after a pause, with averted face, "I was with the woman I am about to marry!"

"Ah!" If her life had depended on it she could not have refrained from clasping her hands together and wringing them so that they hurt each other. "And who is she?"

"Miss Bonanza, an American heiress."

He did not know why he added this. Certainly from no wish to pain her further.

"Then it is her money?"

"No."

He was looking away towards the sea; he could not look at the poor little pinched face, down which a bitter rain of tears was pouring.

"You care for her?"

"I love her."

In mercy to her he must force the truth home on her; must compel her to understand that he had never loved, could never love her; and yet every word he uttered stabbed himself. If everything about her had not been, in his eyes, so pitiable, utterance of the truth would have seemed less cruel.

"It is so easy to love an heiress," she said, with a husky laugh.

"Yes; but I am not a man to sell myself."

There was silence between them for a moment, unbroken save by the distant sigh of the tide. Then,—

"I wonder, is it more ignoble to sell oneself,

being a man, or to give oneself undesired, being a woman?" she asked.

"I don't know; but as the question does not concern either of us, we need not be at the trouble to answer it."

"It concerns me. You are kind to try to spare me, but I am beyond being grateful. I don't seem to mind how much you know, since I have lost you. Had I been one of yourselves, and rich, I might have won you; but you see I had no chance, and you have fallen to Miss Bonanza's lot, and she, perhaps, was so happy that she did not want you very much."

Her words lashed him like hail—lashed and tortured him, and yet he was dumb. He felt himself a culprit and despicable, and yet the justice in him cried out inarticulately on his own behalf.

He had never desired this girl—never thought of her; she was nothing to him. But now that her eyes questioned him, burning red-hot through her tears, he could only answer lamely,—

"I am very sorry; you do me too much honour."

"She gave a hysterical laugh.

"It is hard for you to be told this, and to have to answer that you are very sorry."

"What can I say? Can I lie to you?" he cried desperately. "I love another woman, and I am going to marry her, yet I am miserable for your sake."

Had their sexes been reversed he would have offered her friendship instead of love, and rounded some phrase prettily, and retreated from the situation gracefully. But as things were, that was impossible; nature and circumstances had put him in a false position, and

it was on him that the shame and humiliation of the girl's confession seemed to fall.

She had taken his arm and was leaning on it, and, in some unaccountable way, he felt himself mean to abjectness, though he knew himself guilty of no wrong.

"I wonder will the time ever come when I shall regret that I have told you this?" she asked desolately, clinging to the arm that was to support another woman through all the years of her life.

"There is no reason why you ever should," he said gently.

"No; and except for your sake I don't think I ever shall, because you are such a good man. I do you full justice, you see, although another woman has won you. You were not to blame, it was all my fault, my madness from the beginning; and since you are what you are, I am not yet ashamed. It will even help me to bear it better that you know the truth and are sorry. And do not think I am unconscious of all you have done, of all your courtesy and chivalry, of the respectful kindness you always showed me when I did not seem to respect myself. Well, it is all over now, except to say good-bye, and Heaven bless you."

They had neared the town, and the lighted lamps were gleaming yellowly in the twilight.

She held out her hand to him, and there was a tremulous smile quivering about her white lips.

"Good-bye," he said huskily, and kissed her on the forehead, and so parted from her.

The sun had long set, and the little stars that Tom had so often watched shiver in the sky were out in all their brightness when Miss

Kenwick pulled the bell at Miss Parkinson's hall door.

The bell tingled very faintly, for the hand that pulled it was as weak as that of a child; but faint as the summons was, Miss Parkinson heard and answered it.

"They have come," she said in a whisper, laying her hand on Miss Kenwick's arm, and drawing her into the hall.

The governess was going to "catch it" to a dead certainty; but often as Miss Parkinson had wished for that contingency, now that it was imminent she was sorry.

"Who have come?"

"Little Tom's father and mother."

Miss Kenwick heard apathetically. What did that or anything else matter?"

"And he is very ill. The doctor has been here and is much alarmed about him, and his aunt says he must have been shamefully neglected."

Still no answer. She was sure to be blamed, but she did not feel that condemnation could hurt her.

"The doctor thinks he is almost sure to die."

"Who is sure to die?" she cried sharply.

"Little Tom."

Then Miss Kenwick burst into a laugh that gave Miss Parkinson quite a turn.

"If he dies, it will be of a piece with all the rest," she said.

However, Tom did not die; and the reproaches with which Aunt Maria meant to overwhelm the governess were never uttered; for how could a soft, gentle woman like Aunt Maria utter reproaches to a haggard creature who seemed half demented by the child's

danger; who attended on him slavishly during the weeks of his illness, and out-wearied the love of those nearest and dearest to him by her watchfulness and patience? The contest with Death was close and keen, and perhaps Miss Kenwick battled in prayer both for herself and little Tom, and found some solace for her sore heart that way.

The doctor said she was a capital nurse, and talked somewhat of a missed vocation; but Miss Kenwick proved herself unworthy of his encomiums by fainting the first time Tom spoke her name.

That is all the story. Mr Hunter married Miss Bonanza, and made her a good husband, and was very happy as a Benedict; and if she never heard the Lykeham episode it is rather her misfortune, as nothing shows her husband in a better light. But there are certain things a man cannot tell even to the tenderest of wives.

Mr and Mrs Coventry have settled in England, much to Aunt Maria's satisfaction; for, though she adores little Tom, and could not live a single week without seeing him, she confesses that the sole care of other people's children is a heavy responsibility.

In Miss Kenwick's case, the sober progress of half a dozen years spent in the Coventry household amid golden opinions has taken the edge altogether off her personal pain, and she is as happy as the most of us. She says she has a faculty for training children, and is proud of it; and occasionally, in solitary moments, she looks forward to the time when she will educate little Tom's sons and daughters. Certain it is that she has refused some eligible

offers to change her lot ; and it is questionable if she does not, in some illogical and incomprehensible feminine way, think herself a finer woman for having known, loved and lost the one man who ever seemed to her supremely worth affection.

THE MYSTERY CONNECTED WITH MRS JESSOP

THE sensation Mrs Jessop's advent made at Sudbury was incalculable. There had not been a new settler in the neighbourhood for a quarter of a century; there was no reason why there should be new settlers, as the community was altogether self-sufficing. No doubt there were changes that were imperative, as in vicars or doctors or curates, but the newcomers always arrived with credentials of some sort, and were accepted, after reflection, as a matter of course. But a strange woman, coming no one knew whence, without even a servant with her, and taking the only vacant house of any standing in the parish, and that without consulting anyone, certainly gave scope for comment. People thought Mr Girdwood, the proprietor, owed it to his old friends not to have let his house without searching inquiries regarding the intending occupant, if it were only to satisfy legitimate curiosity. But Mr Girdwood, who was vulgar, only slapped his pocket when remonstrated with, and said Mrs Jessop was all right in that quarter; that she paid without a murmur the rent he asked (but never expected

to receive), and that she was to be responsible for all the repairs. "That is credentials enough for me," the man added, with the chuckle that Miss Blyth considered quite horrid. Certainly Mrs Jessop engaged servants at Sudbury, and these, as in duty bound, told everything they could discover about her on their evenings out; but that was not as good as earlier records. The lady evidently had loads of money, and such dainty personal possessions as Sudbury considered sheer waste and sinful extravagance; and she had photographs of friends, and she spoke incidentally now and then of her parents and her early home; but she received no letters as far as Sudbury could elicit, and in all the house there was no portrait of Mr Jessop that the maid-servants could discover.

That the stranger intended to be a permanent resident and not a bird of passage was obvious, for she fell on that respectable Sudbury house in a way that the neighbours considered perfectly savage, clawed the heart out of it, made one room into two or two into one as fast as not, put a hall where the parlour had been, and threw the hall into the drawing-room, filled the sensible gable windows with stained glass, and otherwise juggled with its character in a manner Sudbury had never dreamed of.

Then she did not buy a single stick of furniture at Nutford, where Sudbury had furnished for centuries, but had everything sent in vans from London, if you please, after which her correspondence began briskly enough. Sudbury was suspicious, was indignant, but over and above all, was terribly curious. Who could the stranger be? What could she be? Was she an adventuress? She had opened a bank-

ing account at Nutford, so that item was satisfactory. But the questions remained—was she respectable? and was she quite right in her head? There were many people who were not mad enough for incarceration, that yet were a little touched; again, there were quite mad people who had cunningly eluded suspicion for years, only rolling their eyes and wearing straws in their hair in private. Was Mrs Jessop a criminal? was she a lunatic? or was she an interesting and highly respectable lady?

Mrs Brown, the doctor's wife, was considered the fitting person to solve this doubt. She could pay a visit that would be regarded as semi-professional, in case she decided that Mrs Jessop was not a person whose acquaintance it would be advantageous to the ladies of the neighbourhood to cultivate.

Five spinsters therefore called on Mrs Brown, and had tea in her cosy sitting-room, while they sent her forth on her voyage of discovery, most of them waiting in the window recess to watch for her return.

Mrs Brown came back with a little flutter of interest in her bearing. Mrs Jessop was quite sane—in her opinion rather nice, she said; but certainly her house could only be characterised as remarkable.

The auditors asked for particulars. "Well, the walls are red and blue and green and yellow."

The assembled ladies expressed astonishment.

"And there are lamps standing on the floor, and palm trees on tables, and single curtains sticking straight out from the walls on poles, and a rug in the hall, and no rug at the drawing-room hearth."

"Then she must be mad," Miss Maythorn said.

"She talked quite rationally," Mrs Brown maintained; "and I must say—yes, I must say, though I never saw anything like it before—that the house is not ugly."

Then all the ladies determined to call, but on the same afternoon, because it was always possible that Mrs Brown was mistaken, and that Mrs Jessop was mad; in which case, if she proved violent, it would be feasible to give an alarm before she had killed more than two or three of them. But they would not enter all together, as that might render the lady suspicious, and precipitate the catastrophe; two would go first, and the others would follow at short intervals.

Mrs Jessop was, however, quite sane; a pretty, elderly, retiring and rather nervous little woman, with somewhat deprecating manners, who, apart from her peculiar house, would have been unnoticeable. That the house embodied the newest ideas in modern art furnishing was quite unknown to the ladies of Sudbury, who wanted to be patronising and friendly, but, in their profound surprise, stared and spoke jerkily.

"She must have heaps and heaps of money," Miss Grey said in an awed tone, as the ladies returned home together.

Miss Blackwood wondered how she had made it, and Miss Blyth said it had been inherited from her husband no doubt, husbands being much the easiest means to a satisfactory income. Then the ladies began to wonder what Mr Jessop had been, it being a foregone conclusion that he no longer was.

From the first Mrs Jessop had aroused interest; in the end she attained to popularity, for she was anxious to please, and, in spite of her possessions, had a humble and conciliatory way with her, which led the shrewdest of her new friends to opine that the late Mr Jessop had been something of a Tartar.

Regarding that gentlemen curiosity could elicit nothing, and better-class Sudbury had too much nice feeling to permit itself the liberty of direct questions. "I am sure he treated her badly, and she will not say so now he is gone," Miss Blyth averred, when several curious touches had found only a wall of silence in front of Mrs Jessop's matrimonial experiences.

"It is much worse to have a bad husband than none," Miss Grey said, with the air of a discoverer.

Once Mrs Girdwood had asked Mrs Jessop if she had ever had any children, and the latter answered, "No, never," in a tone that implied indignation at the question.

Now and then Sudbury was a little indignant that Mrs Jessop made mysteries. Why could she not tell the neighbours all about herself, as they would have told her all about each other? There was nothing in Sudbury to be ashamed of, and they thought badly of it if there were unmentionable shames outside it.

But impersonal indignation will wane in time if not fostered. Mrs Jessop was hospitable, was generous, and had the nicest taste in social matters. With her means, no doubt, she could have entertained lavishly, but she reciprocated the hospitalities of Sudbury in the Sudbury way—a cup of tea in the drawing-room, with

music, conversation, and cards subsequently, and a sandwich and a glass of wine in the bedroom for ladies who stayed late and had far to go, and toddy and biscuits handed round for the gentlemen.

The pretty house and Mrs Jessop's conciliatory manners made these parties very popular, so that her invitations were only declined under pressure of death or irremediable disaster. No doubt the lady had a secret and sorrowful page in her history; but if she chose to keep it to herself the village had no right to be resentful. This was admitted ultimately.

Everyone liked to call on Mrs Jessop and have a chat, she was so sympathetic, so sure to be interested to the extent of five shillings in any local charity; indeed, not one of her tea-parties failed to be followed by several afternoon teas, when her guests came back to tell her how hospitable she had been.

By-and-by it began to be noticed that one person called two or three times after Mrs Jessop's parties, and stayed much longer than was altogether polite if you went by etiquette, and this was the curate, Mr Garthorpe, a young man no longer, as curates ought to be, but a man who had somehow been overlooked when preferment went to others. It always pained Sudbury to think that Mr Garthorpe was quite twenty years older than the vicar, but as this did not depress the good man himself, it would not have been in good taste to console with him.

The curate was a large, fair man, with handsome features, a little coarsened by time and reddened by an outdoor life; he had an abundance of greyish auburn hair, that had a ripple

in it and was worn rather long, and he dressed with a careless clericalism that seemed to say his dandy days were over and he did not care who knew it.

In Sudbury the curate's want of youth did not matter, because among the better-class residents the absence of youth was a conspicuous circumstance. Indeed, there were times when the curate would have liked to be older still, old enough to be indifferent to female society, or to be fearless of having intentions mistakenly attributed to his small courtesies. Mr Garthorpe would have much enjoyed an hour's chat now and then with Miss Grey or Miss Blyth; but these ladies, though elderly, lived at home with their relatives, and had mothers or sisters who somehow always impressed it on him that he was expected soon to declare his feelings. Now, Mr Garthorpe had no feelings to declare; he liked chatting with the Sudbury ladies, but he had no desire that the chat should extend through a lifetime, therefore Mr Garthorpe ceased to call. He always went to parties when invited, but the frivolity of dropping in of an evening subsequently he abandoned.

Mrs Jessop was differently circumstanced. She was no older than Miss Blyth, but she had seen more, had been married and widowed, and was therefore less fanciful and emotional. She was not likely to misunderstand friendly intercourse, and she had no relatives to gossip over his civilities, the civilities he liked to confer on all women. Therefore Mr Garthorpe called a good many times at Mrs Jessop's; indeed, called so often and stayed so long now and then, that Mrs Jessop had got into the

habit of regarding one particular seat in the drawing-room as Mr Garthorpe's chair.

"I come so often because I cannot have a chat otherwise," he explained once. "Other people can have the pleasure of entertaining you, but a single man, with a housekeeper who has ways of her own, is excluded from the delight of hospitality."

Mrs Jessop assured Mr Garthorpe that he was always heartily welcome, could not come too often, was really kind to take pity on her loneliness; she liked to feel she had real friends at Sudbury, she had been so long without that assurance.

"I suppose you have not had a settled home recently?"

"Not for twenty years," Mrs Jessop answered; whereat Mr Garthorpe surmised privately that the late Mr Jessop must have been in the army. Nothing else could explain a roving life so well. Like everyone else, he never referred to Mrs Jessop's matrimonial experiences; it was now well understood in the village that the lady did not like these talked of.

"A life of continual travel must be wearisome after a time," he said, leaning his elbows on the broad arms of his favourite chair.

Mrs Jessop assented. "When one is young, one fancies that travel will be an enlargement, but you must live among people if you want to penetrate beneath their surfaces."

"I hope Sudbury has not disappointed you?" the curate said tenderly.

"Not at all. I seem to have taken root here," she answered, smiling.

Mr Garthorpe was pensive as he walked home that afternoon, and he sighed distinctly and

audibly as he crossed his hearthstoned threshold and entered his chill, oil-clothed hall. There was no grace, no comfort about a home that had not a lady in it. This thought had only recently penetrated the good man's consciousness, for the house he had occupied for a quarter of a century was no less graceful than when his dear Matilda quitted it eighteen years before. Like Mrs Jessop, Mr Garthorpe had had matrimonial experiences, and, like Mrs Jessop, he talked very little about them now.

When at confession with himself, the curate knew that it was not faithfulness to his lost Matilda that had kept him a widower so long. This was the accredited opinion in the parish, but it was erroneous. Confessing to his own heart, the curate knew he had not been altogether happy as a Benedict. Matilda was a good woman, none better, but she was not interesting, and she was not picturesque. As he admitted this, he glanced up at the piece of needlework framed and glazed above the mantel-piece. He remembered that she had worked it during the period of their engagement—that engagement which he had made during an idle summer and kept as a point of honour, though Matilda never knew the latter fact. There are men who would sacrifice themselves consciously, and make of their sacrifice a martyrdom for the other person, but the curate had not done that. Mrs Garthorpe had been quite happy during her brief married life, and her last words, as he knelt beside her watching the light die out of her thin face, were, "I suppose our life together was too good to last long." That was eighteen years ago. Now for the first time, after eighteen years of solitude, the curate thought he would

like to see a woman's eyes look fondly on him again.

He was not young, certainly not, but neither was Mrs Jessop; no person could consider their marriage unsuitable on that ground — always provided it came to marriage. No doubt the lady might object, but Mr Garthorpe did not seriously think that she would do so. He had the good opinion of himself that befits a popular man in holy orders. And if they married, they would be certain to get on well together. Mrs Jessop was a yielding, gentle, womanly woman; she would never wish to dominate him as Matilda had naturally done. The truth was, Matilda had dominated him a good deal; if she had lived, she would probably have dominated the parish.

A youth falls in love for love's sake; a middle-aged man is more prone to fall in love for the sake of peace and comfort. Before six months had elapsed, the curate was consciously attracted by the new parishioner, and as anxious as a boy to find favour in her eyes. If Mrs Jessop's easy circumstances were part of her charm, what of that? Is it any more unworthy to love a woman for the atmosphere of well-being surrounding her than for her complexion or her profile?

Now, Mrs Jessop was not altogether blind to Mr Garthorpe's overtures, which at first she might have been supposed to encourage in a diffident way. She smiled, and sometimes blushed at his approach. She never seemed to find the time spent in his society too long, or any opinion that he enunciated characterised by anything but the profoundest wisdom. But after a time her manner underwent a change;

she avoided meeting him; instead of blushing she turned pale at his approach; more than once her parlourmaid declared she was not at home, when Mr Garthorpe knew he had seen her through the window.

The curate was nonplussed; he was even piqued. In all his life before no woman had ever fled at his approach, and if this one kept on doing so, he was bound to know the reason why. Had he been a more impetuous man, he would have had the matter out by letter, but Mr Garthorpe was experienced enough to know that in great crises letters should not be resorted to if possible; they only explain a portion of our meaning, which a look, a smile, would modify or alter altogether.

When two people live in the same village, the one can only avoid the other within certain limits. Twice Mr Garthorpe had been turned from Mrs Jessop's door with a polite "Not at home"; the third time, finding the front door ajar, he simply walked in unannounced. The lady was in the drawing-room, and was rearranging some bracket ornaments. When the curate stepped into her presence she dropped one of these, and it was broken into twenty fragments. This circumstance might not have seemed propitious, as the ornament was a costly one, but Mr Garthorpe was not timid.

"This comes of living too much alone," he said; "one becomes afraid even of a harmless man." He picked up the broken pieces and laid them on the table, then he took one of Mrs Jessop's hands and led her to a seat. "You are trembling," he said.

"I have not been quite well lately," she faltered.

"Neither have I. Perhaps if we talked a certain subject over we might both feel better," he said.

"I must beg you not to say anything that will spoil our friendship," the lady replied, with some dignity.

"Why should it spoil our friendship? I think it might make us better friends than ever. To know that I like you much, how can that make you dislike me?"

"I don't dislike you," Mrs Jessop said tremulously.

"Then why have you avoided me lately? Is it because you know I love you? If you cannot love me, say so. I would rather know the worst than be kept on tenterhooks. At my age I have not time to waste in that way," he added ruefully.

Mrs Jessop began to cry. The curate took that as a hopeful sign; he came closer to her. "We are neither of us as young as we once were, but I am far from admitting that the best of our days are over," he said. "Much prospective happiness has come into my life since I made your acquaintance, and many thoughts of how beautiful we might together render the world for each other. Could we not make my dreams real by—loving each other?"

"It can never, never be," Mrs Jessop said, with trembling firmness.

Mr Garthorpe's face grew very grave. "I know I have asked a great deal, have been over bold, perhaps, but we are both so lonely that I thought—"

"It is not that I dislike you," the lady said in a low voice.

"Then what is it?"

"I have a—a secret." She looked up with a certain pallid courage that made the curate's heart stand still.

"I don't suppose the secret is very formidable," he said, with a half-hearted laugh. And then a certain awe stole over him. "Perhaps your husband is still alive?" he said.

"No, it is not that."

"Then what is it?"

"Mr Garthorpe, we had better leave it; it is my own secret, my own—sorrow," the lady said, with some dignity. "Our lives need never converge, and therefore it will never harm you or make you ashamed."

The curate extended his hand with a generous movement. "If you care for me I shall not be afraid of any secret of yours," he said, and then his heart failed him a little. There are secrets of which the Church takes cognisance. "I am sure it is nothing disgraceful," he added anxiously.

"I call it disgraceful now," she faltered. "I did not so regard it once; it is only since I began to think of telling you that I have fully realised the nature of what I have done."

"For the sin of others I would not hold you responsible," the curate said slowly.

"The sin is my own."

"Poverty would not matter much."

"I am not poor."

The man drew a long breath. He was in love—yes, certainly in love with this middle-aged woman who, even in her tears, had a certain grace about her, and who deferred to his opinion as the late Matilda had never done; but at his age love does not blind a man to the claims of position. A questionable

Mrs Jessop might be no less charming, but she was infinitely less desirable as a wife.

"We can always be friends," he said slowly; "no worse for the hope we have had, if less happy for the hope we may not pursue. If there had been no obstacle, could you have cared for me?" It was love that spoke this time, overleaping the barrier of his caution.

"Yes." Her hands were clasped in her lap, and for the first time he noticed that she had removed her wedding ring. "When I thought you were beginning to like me—in that way—you will never be able to understand the bitterness of my tardy repentance. But repentance does not avail when the cause for it remains. I have prayed, but it does not make any difference."

"Help does not always come immediately," he said hurriedly.

"And I have asked for guidance. I have gone to the Bible, on my knees, seeking advice, but this was all I found,—'And Bezaleel made the ark of shittim-wood: two cubits and a half were the length of it, and a cubit and a half the breadth of it'!" At this she gave a hysterical laugh that hurt him like a stab.

"Let us not talk of it; let us put the beautiful might-have-been away from us," he said; "let us be good friends again, forgetting that you have anything to confess."

"I have not confessed yet."

"No, and let me beg you not to do so; it would only distress us both."

"No; it will relieve me to tell you. You are a good man, and will feel for me, if anyone could. Mr Garthorpe, I have never been a married woman."

"I thought it was something like that," he said, with a groan.

"You cannot understand the temptation," she went on, turning and facing him, her hands clasped in front of her, and every vestige of colour faded from her face. "I don't understand it now myself, it seems so inadequate, but I was so lonely and always at a disadvantage, and growing old, and it seemed a thing that could harm nobody—"

"Then it was not a sin of youth?"

She looked at him, her eyes opening wide. "Of course not; there would have been no inducement then, it would have had no meaning."

"And the man?"

"What man?"

"Mr Jessop."

"Have I not told you there was no Mr Jessop?"

"I don't think I understand what you mean," the curate said fretfully, as he took out his handkerchief and wiped his damp face. "I really don't know what you are driving at."

"Have I not told you? I am not a married woman. I am not a widow. I am Miss Jessop—not Mrs." Here she burst into stifling sobs. "I never had a chance of caring for anyone when I was young, and I never thought anyone would care for me at my age, and to be an old maid puts one at such a disadvantage. You are afraid to be friendly with men, dreading their good-humoured disdain. A rich old maid seems an anomaly; people imagine she must have had a history and a disappointment. I felt it more and more as I grew older, till I said, 'I shall pretend I have been married like another. I will call myself Mrs Jessop.' And, do you

know, I am sure people have treated me more deferentially since."

The curate wiped his face again, but this time he was smiling. "I expected something quite different," he said.

"And do you think very badly of me?"

"Not if you will give me leave to think very well of you."

She drew a long breath. "It is such a relief that you know," she said. "While I was travelling about, it never mattered; but here, where everyone asked about my husband, and wanted to see his photograph, oh! you cannot imagine how dreadful it was!"

"In the future show them my photograph," Mr Garthorpe said, and then he laughed. "After all, there is some comfort in the thought that I shall be your first love."

The banns were published in a remote parish, and to this day Sudbury has never elucidated the mystery connected with Mrs Garthorpe's first marriage.

NEMESIS AND MRS MYLES*

CHAPTER I

IT was only a few weeks after Jamie Myles's death, and the fine funeral which the widow regarded with some secret pride and self-gratulation, when the vehicle disappeared out of the cart-shed and the winnowing cloth was taken down. It was the absence of the latter that struck James first; for months it had been like a window blind that kept a treasure from the too curious eye of the sun; now the sun stared boldly into the open shed, and the shed was empty.

"Mother, where is the vehicle?" James asked, with some heat and indignation.

"Sold," Mrs Myles answered briefly.

"You sold it!" James cried, a little incredulously.

"I did, of course. What call have we for a vehicle? When should we drive it, I should like to know? You had better try not to be a fool, James."

"He spent seven years making it," James said, with a flush in his cheeks.

"It was foolishness first and last"—Mrs

* Being a sequel to the story of "Jamie Myles's Vehicle" in '*Mid Green Pastures*.'

Myles spoke with deliberation—"but it kept him quiet, and I never grudged his time to it. Do you think it is a thing he would approve of to see it standing there useless and showing mildew? It's not you or me could find time to shine it up every day the way he did, so I sold it when I got the chance."

"I suppose a good offer would tempt you," James said, not knowing whether he meant to be disrespectful or the reverse. "What did you get for it?"

"It fetched a pound," Mrs Myles answered, looking her son straight in the eyes.

James gave a kind of groan. "Mother, you have a hard heart," he said.

"I daresay my heart would seem softer if I'd haggled over the price, but that was never my sort. When I've got a thing I don't want, I'm not the one to make a hard bargain with a neighbour; a pound is neither here nor there to us."

"That is why it seems a pity—"

"James, I'm not going to be found fault with," said Mrs Myles, firmly; "it's a thing your father never did, and I must ask you not to begin it; I take badly with it at my time of life."

"Who bought the vehicle?" James asked, without any relaxation of the grim lines about his mouth.

"Freddy Bowles—he means to post with it; he says there is a fortune to be made by posting."

"But to sell it for a pound! Surely you might have let it stand to remind us of him."

"The coffin cost a pound," Mrs Myles answered.

James ceased to argue ; he recognised, as his father had done, that Mrs Myles dwelt in a region inaccessible to sentiment.

Thus gala days ended for the vehicle, and its career of profitable usefulness began. Freddy Bowles hired it out for weddings, for funerals, for courtings ; indeed, it was in the latter capacity that it became most popular. It looked smart on the street, though the experienced said it drove heavily, and young men who went a-wooing at a distance regarded it as calculated to inspire confidence in their monetary position, almost as if they owned it. When Freddy Bowles drove the vehicle down the Grimpat Street, the curious used to rush forth to ask in a shout, " Who is it this time, Freddy ? " by which they meant to inquire what shy swain was waiting a quarter of a mile away for the conveyance that would carry him dignifiedly into the region of romance. But Freddy, being discreet, was wont to answer only by a grin and a wave of his whip, which intimated that on a subsequent occasion he might be disposed to impart information, but that for the moment more serious affairs occupied him.

In spite of the cheerful associations which the vehicle thus acquired, James Myles never saw it pass without a certain sense of depression. Its present use and the smallness of the sum it had fetched seemed to emphasise the futility of his father's life. James could not realise that the value which commerce attached to the vehicle was a mere detail from which Jamie, in his joy and success as a creator, stood quite apart. James admitted that his mother's position was logical, and that the sale of unnecessary possessions is a reasonable action ; but none the

less he often looked after the vehicle with a smarting feeling in his eyes, and a curious sensation of depression in the region of his heart.

When James Myles fell in love, his choice fixed itself on a girl entirely devoid of Amazonian tendencies, whom not even the most casual observer could have called strong-minded. Lyddy Fane was a shy slip of slender maidenhood, with eyes like the blue of harebells, the delicate colour that is sometimes found in cheeks kissed only by country winds, and dark locks rippling away from a pretty, white forehead. People said Lyddy was not over robust, but they also said she was gentle and good, and James Myles had a kind of idea that he did not care so very much for robustness in a wife. James liked to think that Lyddy looked like a girl who needed a protector, and he was vain enough to imagine he could enact that part not unworthily. But he said nothing of this when he made his announcement to his mother; he merely stated that Lyddy had a fortune of two hundred pounds, and that it had occurred to him that he might do worse than marry her. Mrs Myles answered that the two hundred pounds would be useful, but that, if he took his time, she believed he could get a girl with more. James said what Lyddy had would do.

It was an April night when James brought Lyddy home; the sky had a far-off blue-grey-ness, there was a wet breath in the west wind, and the undulating hills looked black in the moonlight. The pair did not speak much, neither had ever learned the trick of easy expression; and to drive the old sorrel mare, that belonged to his father-in-law, with one

hand, while he held his wife's slim little fingers with the other, took all James's attention. But Lyddy did not want him to speak; she would have been content to move forward throughout an eternity with her hand in his and his arm within reach, when she wanted to lay her cheek against it; furthermore, Mrs Myles sat on the seat behind them, and in such a case tender communings of any kind are difficult.

Mrs Myles had not been encouraged to go to the wedding, because the neighbourhood held a superstition that the presence of the bridegroom's mother on such occasions boded misfortune to the newly-married pair. James had not ventured to ask her not to go, but he did say,—

“Do you think it's lucky?”

To which Mrs Myles answered promptly,—

“Quite lucky; your grandmother was at our wedding,” as if illustration more appropriate could not be adduced.

Some of the neighbours were less reticent than James, but Mrs Myles argued that no one had a better right than a mother to be present at the wedding of her only child, which in a way was admitted to be reasonable. Mrs Myles, accordingly, was present in her weeds—the weeds she said she would wear all her life, as befitted a widowed woman. Apart from these, her aspect was cheerful. She approved the viands at the wedding feast with the air of a connoisseur, and bore herself with amiable cheerfulness towards the bride's family. She also presented the bride with her own silver teapot; it looked very well among the utilities offered on the occasion, and in the evening Mrs Myles wrapped it up and took it home again.

Mrs Myles said she had given strict orders to

the maid-of-all-work to have the fire and lamp alight, and a cheerful table spread for the home-coming ; but Liza, the maid, maintained to her dying day that this was the biggest lie Mrs Myles had ever told, and her tone conveyed that she credited Mrs Myles with some previous success in that department. At any rate, the fire was out, the lowered lamp smelt most grievously, and Liza had gone to bed.

"Never mind, never mind," Lyddy said, standing, a slender and graceful figure in her long travelling cloak, in the chill and evil-smelling apartment. "It is not cold, that is to say not very, and I am not a bit hungry, and I am sure James is not either ; at least, not any hungrier than to need a glass of milk and a bit of home-baked. Don't you worry about us, Mrs Myles, we are all right."

At the moment it must be admitted that Mrs Myles had the grace to feel ashamed.

"I never knew Liza to behave so badly before," said Mrs Myles, bustling from kitchen to larder, and back again, her skirt pinned up washerwoman - fashion, and the crape streamers of her bonnet floating behind her. "I'll talk to her in the morning, see if I don't."

It was the beginning of Lyddy's domestic disillusioning. She was the meekest of mortals, the least assuming, the least likely to suffer agonies under slights. She did not claim any dignity, she did not want any ; she was satisfied to be James Myles's wife ; but she did want a little private home life, a few occasions when she might be alone with her own heart and with her husband. She had arranged her wedding presents in the parlour—the books,

the cushions, the brackets, that one and another had given her—and it was her fancy, when she was not wanted, to go in there and sit by herself. Once or twice her husband had quitted the shop and had slipped in after her, and they had half an hour of playful converse together, of being lovers over again. But Mrs Myles did not approve of this; there had been no nonsense in her married life, and she did not see why there should be in James's.

Mrs Myles locked the parlour door, and put the key into the big pocket that dangled by her side under her bombazine gown. When the parlour needed dusting, she unlocked it, but these occasions were infrequent. James did not seem to mind this; he had the shop to attend to, and the farm, and that kept him busy, and also, Lyddy concluded, men were less affectionate than women. There were times when she would have given the world to have stroked his hair, to have felt his arm about her; times when she could not refrain from laying her hand on his, and looking at him with tears in her eyes; but these manifestations, under Mrs Myles's maliciously laughing glance, made him uncomfortable, and he put them away from him hastily.

The neighbours said that Lyddy was poor-spirited, that she should have held her own better with the Mylesees; that, with her fortune and her respectable family to back her, she had no business to let herself be put upon, and that if people took a stand with Mrs Myles they might find that she would know when she had met her match as well as anyone.

Impersonal advice of this kind may be well intended, but it is not very helpful. Lyddy

could not take a stand; all she wanted was to be loved, and apparently she had come to the wrong fountain for that. She did not complain, she would not vex James by doing so; she knew he was good, and she loved him, but she got out of health and out of spirits, and after her baby was born she did not make a good recovery.

The baby was, in Lyddy's eyes, a wonderful creature. She would have been happy to sit crooning over it all day long, and Mrs Myles's habit of treating it as a rough piece of mechanism tortured her. Mrs Myles would bathe it in cold water—she said that hardened it; would expect it to sleep or be fed at certain intervals, and would shake it more roughly than befitted its tender time of life if it manifested prepossessions or reluctances. Lyddy felt these things with morbid keenness, and grew nervous when she heard the elder woman's voice or her foot-fall. She got into the habit of sitting crying, with the baby clasped to her breast, her slow tears falling on its downy head.

Lyddy sat chiefly in the kitchen that looked out on the paved yard, with its circle of office-houses, and no open space save that with the sky above it, and perhaps that was why her thoughts began to direct themselves towards the heaven which she fancied lay there. There were homes there, there was love, she had never heard there were mothers-in-law, and at that she laughed softly through her tears.

Mrs Myles said Lyddy was lazy, because she liked to sit in the rocking-chair with the baby on her knee. Mrs Myles considered the nursing of children a mere excuse for idleness. She had never been given that way; she was not

aware that she had nursed James a single hour throughout all his babyhood, she said, whereat Lyddy interrupted hastily,—

“Then that accounts—” but stopped, and no questioning could elicit the end of her sentence.

CHAPTER II

DR BRYCE thought Lyddy was ill. He told James that she needed more cheerful surroundings, more nourishing food and more sunshine. The house was too gloomy, the atmosphere too depressing, Mrs Myles a little too strenuous with one so non-resistant. “You must take care of your wife,” he concluded gravely.

Poor James hardly understood what aspect the taking care was to assume. He told his mother that Dr Bryce thought Lyddy was hardly sufficiently well fed; whereupon Mrs Myles inferred that Lyddy had complained to the doctor, and consequently gave her “a piece of her mind.”

“I have been as well brought up as you,” said Mrs Myles, with tremulous indignation, “and I think what is good enough for James’s mother is good enough for his wife. Better food! I wonder what folks are coming to, anyway.”

“Mrs Myles,” said Lyddy, impressively, “I don’t care if you feed me on cobblestones, and that’s the truth. I have never been set on eating all the days of my life, and if I had but a meal in the day I shouldn’t complain.”

"There's where it is!" said Mrs Myles, incisively. "A meal in the day, indeed. I suppose you give that out to the neighbours, that you get but one meal a day. But, thank the Lord! the neighbours know me too well to mind anybody's stories."

Lyddy sighed. To say that she rarely saw the neighbours, never talked of Mrs Myles, and never misrepresented her, would have been long and useless; so she said nothing. James brought home a bottle of wine for Lyddy once; but Mrs Myles said drink was a thing she would never sanction in her house, and she locked the bottle away. Liza declared that she drank the wine herself, but Liza and Mrs Myles had never been on altogether harmonious terms since the bridal home-coming.

Then James called on Mrs Webb. Mrs Webb was now the most notable housewife in Grimpat, which goes to prove that book learning need not ultimately militate against the domestic virtues.

"Mrs Webb," said James, "I want you to look after my wife a bit; I want you to get things for her and take them to her, as if they were from yourself. You have a good heart, and you won't refuse me this, I know."

"I would do more than that for your father's son," said Mrs Webb, who, like the rest of the neighbours, retained kindly memories of Jamie. So it fell out that Mrs Webb carried in little dainties often, on a pretty damask-covered tray, and sat beside Lyddy, crooning to the baby, till she made sure that the jelly, or the soup, or whatever else she had brought, was consumed in the right quarter, which attentions only led Mrs Myles to say that if Ephraim Webb stood his

ground financially, in view of the wasteful wife he had, it would go to prove that the age of miracles was not entirely over.

But, in spite of such irregular tendance, Lyddy did not get better, and when the summer was waning she died.

"There is one thing I want you to promise," she said to her husband, stroking his hand with gentle fingers as he sat beside her.

"What is it, Lyddy?" he asked huskily.

"That you will marry again."

James Myles started, and looked at his wife with incredulous eyes.

"You'll likely not want to," she went on gently, "not having a very happy way for a wife, and not being ever likely, maybe, to forget me altogether; but there's the boy — little Jamesie; I want to think that there will be somebody to pet him and be good to him."

"I'll be good to him, Lyddy."

"You'll be busy most times, and men don't know what children need."

"But a step-mother, Lyddy!"

Lyddy turned and hid her face on her husband's shoulder, crying softly, "She'll be better to him than—than—"

"Ah, Lyddy, how can you ask me to put another in your place? My first love, the wife of my youth— Oh, Lyddy, nobody can ever take your place; no, no!"

"Hush!" she said, for he had broken into sobs. "I don't want her to have just my place, not altogether, you know; but, without having that, she might have a very good place still. You'll be good to her, and if she is a little different from me, she will suit your mother better. I don't ask you to do this at once, you

know, but some time before Jamesie begins to think or to wonder what love is like."

"Oh, Lyddy, it is dreadful that you should ask this now. I thought women always asked the very opposite."

Lyddy did not answer or reason further, only stroked the crisp black hair on his bowed head.

Everyone said James Myles was a broken-hearted man when he walked behind Lyddy's coffin to the churchyard, and that it was more than the autumn rains that made the grass grow so greenly above her. But her grave was on the street side of the village church, and, therefore, James was never seen to visit it; but people were wont to relate in a whisper how, when the nights were dark, sounds of bitter weeping used to come over the low wall.

That was what made it incredible when it was rumoured that James was to marry Maria Brooks. Lyddy only a year dead, and James, with the hollows under his eyes, that had never lost their sad depth since he said farewell to Lyddy, and Maria not just a girl—thirty, and as strong minded as women are made; a well-built, ruddy-faced, clear-eyed woman, capable too, but quite devoid of that nameless grace which country people do not know how to define, and which elsewhere is called "charm." It would be as difficult to fancy a man in love with Maria Brooks as with a beam or a barn door. It is true that love was not deemed an essential at Grimpat, and that women were married there for their capacity, or the cattle they owned, or the bit of money somebody had laid aside for them, and were as happy as the majority ultimately. But James Myles had been

held to harbour sentiment, and people felt, not unreasonably, that he might have seemed to mourn Lyddy a little longer, or might at least have complimented her by choosing someone a little more like her. Then Maria had no money, so the explanation did not lie there. Even Maria herself did not know why she had attracted the melancholy man who asked her for his wife, or that the explanation lay in the fact that his child had run to her, and had stroked her ruddy cheek when she lifted him tenderly on her strong arm. It might have been Maria's healthy colour that captivated Jamesie, but that preference decided Jamesie's father.

'Are you going to take him?' Maria's mother asked.

Maria laughed. 'I have had too little pick and choice to refuse him.'

Mrs Brooks sighed. 'They say his mother is ill to live with.'

'Ay; well, I've heard of folks before that met their match in the end. If Mrs Myles makes me afraid of her, it's more than anybody else has done so far.'

Mrs Myles did not attend James's second nuptials. 'We're not going to have a wedding as if we were young folks,' said Maria, the practical; 'we'll just have my own family, and the minister, and we'll go home early in the evening; you can tell your mother so.'

The Grimpat people said it was the queerest thing—they had seen James Myles, actually seen him, when the moon rose on the eve of his wedding, standing with his forehead bowed on the headstone above Lyddy's grave.

It was seven o'clock when the newly-wedded pair came home, and the first sound that en-

countered them as they entered was the screams of Jamesie, who objected to his cold bath in cold weather as lustily as he had ever done.

"I hate to hear a child cry," said Maria, and ran upstairs and took off her hat and mantle. When she came down both Mrs Myles and Jamesie were in a fury in the kitchen, Mrs Myles compelling Jamesie to a recumbent position in his bath, Jamesie standing rebelliously on his two chill feet, and clutching at Mrs Myles's dress or cap borders indiscriminately.

"You bad child!" the grandmother was panting, "but you sha'n't conquer me;" and at this juncture Maria entered.

"Won't you have your bath, Jamesie?" she said pleasantly. "Why, of course not, when it's cold. A wise fellow!" She lifted Jamesie out and set him on the floor, then removed the kettle from the fire and made the bath tepid, stirring the water with her other hand as she did so.

"Now try. See, put your hand in first. Nice, is it not? Now, in you go altogether—there's a man!" Then she turned to Mrs Myles. "When one takes the right way with children, they're very easily managed."

"It's the first time Jamesie has ever been allowed to disobey me," said Mrs Myles, grimly.

"He has not disobeyed you; he has taken his bath quite nicely. Why should he have it cold, the poor little mortal? You would not like it cold yourself."

When Jamesie came in on his new mother's arm, warm, smiling, and only rosier for the tears he had shed, to say good-night to his

father, James looked at Maria with affection in his eyes that was quite new to her, at any rate.

That was the beginning of a new order of things at the Myles's. Maria simply assumed that she was mistress in James's house, that her plans were to be carried out, that her ideas were the right and practical ones. She asked the key of the parlour door, opened it, and left it open. "A room one uses every day has no need of a key," she said.

"It is the best room," Mrs Myles observed.

"Of course it is," Maria assented cheerfully; but she left the door open, and put the key away. She did not interfere with Mrs Myles, but she would not permit Mrs Myles to interfere with her. Maria liked her chair in a certain position by the window. Once when she vacated it Mrs Myles put it into line against the wall, and that with an air of intention. Maria made no remark, she merely looked Mrs Myles in the eyes, and moved the chair back again. Mrs Myles trembled and said nothing.

But to tremble with wrath, and give it no utterance, was not at all Mrs Myles's way. Maria had been about a month in her new home when the storm broke.

"You to dare—to dare to assume all you do," Mrs Myles said, spluttering a little in the tumult of her emotion over Maria's latest peccadillo; "you, a pauper, that I allowed my son to bring into my house!"

"Into your house!" said Maria, drawing herself up very straight, and resting her hands on her hips in a nonchalant attitude; and will you be good enough to tell me how it comes to be your house? Is it not the house

James's father built? and is not James his only son and heir? You never allowed your husband to think his soul was his own, much less his property, after you married him; if you had, maybe he might have made a will in your favour, but as he omitted this, the shop, and the land, and the house are James's. He has been very good to you, and he is willing to make you welcome here as long as you behave yourself, but you are not going to take the upper hand with me, as you did with poor Lyddy. You killed her, but I'm another sort—you don't kill me, not if I know it. Now, mind this once for all, Mrs Myles, and don't let me have to say it again: this place is James's, and I'm James's wife, so that if there's a pauper about I'm not the one. You have neither a penny nor a penny's worth here, and you are not going to rule James, or his property, or his wife, or his child one hour longer."

Mrs Myles's face had grown ghastly. "Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!" she said in a suffocating whisper. Maria's words were like a lightning flash into the recesses of her mind. During five-and-thirty years she had never realised until that moment that she had no personal right to James Myles's freehold house and farm, or to the business which had his name over the front door, and the thought appalled her as nothing had ever been done in her previous experience.

"I have given my whole life to keep things straight here," she said hoarsely. "If there is law or justice in the land—"

"You can go to law when you like, Mrs Myles," Maria answered calmly; "but it will be a very simple lawyer that will not tell you that

you have not one inch of ground to stand on, and law with your own son will not look very well in the eyes of the country, more especially as James means to treat you well. You are very welcome to a home here as long as you like to stay, and when you don't like, James will provide for you with anybody you fancy to live with. But we can't let you make life hell for us. You treated your husband like a beggar his life long, and you badgered Lyddy into her grave; but things of that kind must stop some time, and we choose that they shall stop now."

Mrs Myles sat down, the cold sweat was trickling in drops over her pale face. All Maria said scarcely brushed her consciousness; she realised only the one appalling fact—that she had nothing, owned nothing, could do nothing.

"You are a cruel woman," she said, after a pause.

Maria laughed. "Then there is a pair of us," she said.

"After five-and-thirty years!" Mrs Myles went on, in a stifled whisper.

Maria grew grave. "See here, Mrs Myles, if we go into the ins and outs of the position, I might say that you have enjoyed five-and-thirty years of unfair and hard dealing with the people belonging to you. You put your husband out of his place in life, and your daughter-in-law out of the world. After five-and-thirty years it is quite time that kind of thing should cease. We ask nothing from you but fair play, but we mean to have that. If you had treated your husband fairly, you never would have been in your present position. He would have willed anything, done anything, you

asked him. That you have been whipped with your own rod is not our fault, and it will never hurt you very hard unless you draw it across your own back."

Mrs Myles did not answer; she rose and tottered from the room. In the little white-washed hall that intervened between the kitchen and the shop she stood still a moment, then looked up and raised one clenched hand, as though appealing to a force existent on high. "I ask if it is fair, if it is fair?" she said hoarsely; but there was no answer to the agonised question, save the careless, unconscious, distant laughter of a little child.

Mrs Myles capitulated after this. She was too thoroughly beaten to attempt any further stand. To think that she owned nothing, was nobody, and that the whole parish knew it! It was heart-breaking, it was maddening. She wanted no one to see her; she acquired furtive ways, slipping out of sight when the neighbours came near, and shuddering when people spoke of Mrs Myles, knowing they meant her daughter-in-law. As a matter of fact, she had little to complain of. Maria was almost aggressively kind since she had assumed the reins, but her patronage was harder to bear than spitefulness would have been. To think of her having full authority, and the woman she had dispossessed as little voice as a stranger in her own house—her own house that had never been hers! "If James only knew!" she said often to herself, and she did not refer to her son. Her heart ached, not with remorse, but with a passionate self-pity. He had been good to her, he would have taken care of her, he never intended that she should be left dependent

on her son, or her son's wife; but he was beyond appeal now.

Mrs Myles did not know what legal rights she possessed, or if she possessed any, though, when she thought the matter over, she supposed a trifle of money might be hers by law. But what was that, if all the rest was James's? Rage, wrath, humiliation, an intolerable sense of injustice weighed on her, made her nights sleepless and her days heavy. The neighbours did not know how it was that James's wife, who seemed a good-natured woman in the main, had had such a disastrous effect on her mother-in-law.

"I never thought mother would have broken down so early," James Myles said.

"She must have been less robust than she looked," Maria answered. Neither woman had ever told James of their memorable encounter.

"It is a good thing that she has someone as capable and willing as you are to take her place," James said; for, if he did not love his second wife as he had loved Lyddy, he was at least acquiring for her a decided respect, and much confidence in her capacity.

When Mrs Myles was overtaken by her last illness, and laid her down to die, Maria's attentions to her were assiduous. The whole parish said no daughter could have done more; the parish also added that Mrs Myles seemed deficient in gratitude, but that Maria had too good a heart to ask for gratitude.

On the last day of Mrs Myles's life, both her son and his wife were watching by her bed, when she half raised herself, and cried suddenly, in a stifling, agonised voice,—

"James, James!"

Her son bent over her. "I am here, mother ; what is it ?" he said.

But she turned her face impatiently on the pillow. "No ; your father," she answered ; then added, in words that were hardly louder than a sigh, "He was always good to me."

N I A L L

C H A P T E R I

HE stood on a headland that overlooked the sea ; a middle-aged man in the dress of a Catholic priest, with a grave face, and deep set, shrewd grey eyes.

It was July weather, and the wide hills behind him bore patches of blazing gorse and tufts of purple heather here and there on their uneven surface. Below him lay the sea, a dancing sheet of molten silver, whose tiny wavelets broke with dainty grace on the belt of shingle.

The scene was very beautiful, perhaps more beautiful because of its desolation. On all the miles of land and water surrounding the motionless figure on the headland not a living thing stirred but an occasional mountain sheep browsing among the heather ; unless the black speck that danced on the sea, half a league from land, could be regarded as a living thing.

It was on this black speck that Father Donovan's eyes were fixed, as it moved lightly and swiftly as a sea bird towards the shore.

A native curragh or coracle—one of the boats made of osier-work and tarred canvas, that for

centuries, indeed, since long before the dawn of civilisation, have been in constant use among the native population of some parts of Ireland—it looked to the uninitiated the frailest ark of safety to which human life was ever entrusted.

But it was not of its fragility, or its grace, that Father Donovan was thinking, for, in his eyes, there was neither dread nor admiration, only a miserable inarticulate anger.

The curragh had two occupants; one a girl, wearing a sailor hat and a well-cut costume of white and navy blue, the other a young man, who wore the cord trousers and striped shirt of the peasantry, but who carried himself like a prince—as peasants sometimes do—and possessed a face of an unusual and very noble order of beauty.

Lightly and swiftly as a black swan the curragh glided on to the shingle. The man leaped ashore and offered both his hands to the girl, who, with a dainty movement, swung herself out beside him.

Then he gathered her shawls, her basket of fish and other possessions on to the beach, raised the curragh with a sudden, easy movement, rested it a moment on its stern to drip, then turned it face downwards, placed the sculls beneath it, and, depositing a large stone or two on the keel, lest a rising gale should blow it away, lifted the girl's belongings again, and stood looking at her, half in deference, half in adoration.

"You are splendid when you do things like that; you make me think of some of those mediæval heroes—Stilicho or Dietrich of Bern."

The girl's clear, refined tones reached the

priest where he stood, several hundred yards away.

"It is nothing to lift the curragh," the man answered simply.

"Everything is nothing, so you always say, refusing to be flattered."

"But it is nothing. You could do it yourself if you had a mind to."

"Well, well, then, it is easy," she said pettishly. "Anyone could do it, and I am foolish to find you different from all your neighbours at Inchmaree, foolish to be interested in you and to like you."

They had begun to advance up the steep slope of the headland, unconsciously coming straight on to where Father Donovan stood awaiting them, his lips pressed closely together, and his brows drawn down into an austere frown.

"I am sure you are of the race of some of the old Kings of Ireland, or of those chiefs whose beauty produced their pardon when the sovereign was a woman; and your very name, too—Niall. Surely there was a King Niall in Ireland in the grand old days?"

The man did not answer, not knowing what to say. All his pulses were stupidly thrilled by her words and her presence, when the momentary silence was broken by the priest's voice speaking harshly.

"Having your silly head turned, Niall, by the light words of an idle, fine lady?"

Both started and looked up, the man's sun-burnt face flushing crimson, the girl's pale colour deepening by a shade.

"You express yourself very charmingly, Father Donovan," she said, lifting her pretty dark eyes to him, dauntlessly.

"I do not wish to be complimentary, Miss Ormsby; neither my nature nor my calling has been apt to teach me flattery." Then, turning to Niall, "I came out to look for you. Mr Luttrell is at home with the book of flies he promised to shew you. He said he would wait for you; so I shall carry Miss Ormsby's fish for her, and see her home."

He took the basket and the shawl from Niall as he spoke, and the young man submitted confusedly, while the girl was too much startled by his high-handed procedure to protest.

She was a remarkably pretty girl, the lines of her face were refined and correct, her eyes very dark and clear, albeit a trifle shallow, and her figure well rounded and firm.

"Who is this Mr Luttrell?" she asked, after a few moments' silent progress by the priest's side.

"He is son of a neighbour."

"I thought he had been more important, since you have taken the trouble to be his messenger," she answered, with a shadow of impertinence beneath her courtesy.

"Mr Luttrell and Niall have been friends since they were boys," he answered, with a faint indrawing of the breath like an unuttered sigh. "But it was chiefly because I wish to speak with you that I intercepted you to-day."

The girl did not answer. She knew she was going to be lectured; but Edith Ormsby was not unused to being lectured by her seniors, and even enjoyed it now and then.

"I was reading a poem last night, and it made me think of you," he said in his deep suppressed voice.

"A Latin poem, I presume," she said demurely.

"No, an English poem; and it was about a great lady, who took the trouble to make a poor man miserable."

"And for no reason! She must have been a very naughty, great lady."

"She wanted to be amused, and there was no one else at the time."

"Oh, if there was no one else, that explains it; people must be amused, you know."

"Miss Ormsby, I want you to give up making Niall your plaything. The lad is a good lad, and was a very happy one till you came here to make him discontented."

She looked round at him, somewhat startled, ready to be on the defensive, yet not knowing exactly where she had been attacked.

"It is easy for a fine lady to make a working man dissatisfied with his own life and circumstances, so easy that I wonder how any but the poorest nature can take pleasure in doing it."

"But Niall is not like a working man, he is one of Nature's gentlemen. Of course, having lived all his life with you makes a difference, and his appearance counts for so much in the impression he makes. Even Uncle Charlie has noticed him, and has said he thinks him so like what Colonel Tredegar was twenty years ago. And Colonel Tredegar is a county gentleman, and one of Uncle Charlie's oldest friends."

"We are very remote from civilisation here, and life is very dull to most of us," the priest went on, as though he had not heard a word she said; "but, for divers reasons, we are content. Contentment is a great blessing; you must not take it from Niall."

"I don't quite understand you," she said, lifting her pretty eyebrows.

"Do you talk to men of your own position as you talk to Niall, flattering them for their beauty and their strength?"

"Well, perhaps not. I could not honestly, you know, for most of them make a poor enough show."

"Ha, you see, though I know a good deal of human nature, or flatter myself that I do, society is quite an unknown world to me. I did not think any modest woman would have said to any man the things I have heard you say to Niall."

"Sir!"

"I say I did not think it, not knowing society. It may be quite fashionable to tell a man he looks like a king, and make him vain of his beauty."

"You do not mean to put Niall on a level with my friends, I hope," she said, laughing slightly.

"No, I don't; it is you who seem to put him far above your friends, unless you stand on very familiar terms with these."

"Do you not think, Father Donovan, that you somewhat exceed your prerogative?"

"Perhaps I do; yet I mean no offence to you personally. I only wish to protect Niall. He is very dear to me, and I fear you, because of him."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to forget him. I wish you to leave him to his old occupations and his simple pleasures."

"It will be difficult." She looked at him frankly, and without any visible sign of offence.

"That I am in no wise responsible for being located here, I beg you to believe. If I wished to leave Inchmaree this moment, I could not. Uncle Charlie and Aunt Ellen treat me like their bond-slave. Then—well, I like Niall, he amuses me, and the days at the Lodge would be too dreadful if I had no amusement."

"You amuse yourself with a fisherman! I never knew that a lady would take the trouble."

For the first time the girl's face flushed darkly red.

"If there had been any harm in it, Uncle Charlie would have told me so; he is only too ready to say unpleasant things."

"He looks at the matter from your point of view; I look at it from Niall's."

She was silent for a little, then she spoke,—

"I think much that you have said has been uncalled for and unkind, but I grant to your wish what I should have refused to your authority. I shall try not to see Niall again!"

"Thank you."

"And now, I need not trouble you to accompany me further. Will you kindly give me my property, and let me wish you good evening?"

"The basket is too heavy for you. I shall leave it at the Lodge gates."

"It is too much trouble."

"It is no trouble whatever."

"Then, thank you, and good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He lifted his broad-brimmed hat to her with his disengaged hand, and looked after her gloomily as she sped away. Her imperturbability had put him at a disadvantage, and made him feel vaguely dissatisfied with himself. And

yet he had been right to say what he did, and she was an artful, heartless minx.

Father Donovan hated to censure people. Speech was difficult to him at all times, and, therefore, discontent often lay unuttered in his heart till it grew to bitterness. Father Donovan was really one of those exceptional people who could love the sinner while hating the sin, but, in Miss Ormsby's case, the two were so inextricably mingled that he hated both.

It was very rare for Edith Ormsby to be angry. There was not sufficient depth in her for anything to stir her profoundly. She was not a hundred yards away from Father Donovan before she laughed, twisting her neck sideways, and showing all her pretty teeth.

"What a funny old priest, fierce and rude and abusive, but, I suppose, unlimited local authority makes him like that! I wonder why I was such a goose as to let him influence me! If I had made no promise, what would he have done, I wonder? Fulminated against me from the altar, or used the bell, book and candle privately. Well, I have promised, and I suppose I shall have to keep my word; but what a bore it will be! However, it will form a new incident for my next letter, and that is some consolation."

She was walking swiftly, with a light, springy step, and by-and-by she reached a grey-stone house that was placed in a dip in the hillside. It seemed a comfortable modern house, with a garden in front, and a high stone wall sheltering it on the seaward side. Among other houses of its class it would have been unobtrusive enough; but here, where Nature was so sublime and solitary, it looked commonplace to an aggressive degree, and the girl felt this, for she shrugged

her shoulders slightly as she pushed open the little wicket gate, and sauntered slowly up the short gravelled path to the door.

The porch in front of the house was of grey-stone too, and prettily tiled, and a few hardy geraniums bloomed within its shelter. Evidently visitors came here rarely, and were little looked for. The hall door stood wide open, and the wind swept boldly in, whispering round the bare walls, and fluttering the leaves of an almanac that stood on a tiny leather easel on the table.

The girl took up the almanac and looked at it absently. "We shall be here till September," she said, "and this is only the tenth of July. Well, how I shall live through the time, if I have no one to bait my hooks, or take me out in the curragh, or amuse me, Heaven knows, for I don't."

CHAPTER II

FOR three days Miss Ormsby was very busy, laboriously and intentionally so. She turned out all her boxes, and set her maid hard at work improving and freshening her dresses. Then she wrote to her milliner in town to send her a case of hats and bonnets on approval. She did not think she would keep any of these—certainly she did not need them at Inchmaree; but, trying them on would wile away an afternoon. She also studied the weekly fashion papers diligently, and wrote for books of patterns to all the houses that advertised novelties of an attractive de-

scription. Then she set her nimble wits to devise a new arrangement of the drawing-room furniture, by which that apartment could be rendered less bleak and dreary; and when she was fatigued with her exertions she sat down and wrote quite a sheaf of letters to one friend and another.

Meantime, her uncle and aunt watched her, without seeming to do so. They were here at Inchmaree for a purpose, and a good deal against their private inclinations; but they hid their weariness valiantly from each other, and bore quite cheerfully the deprivation of all their home interests.

Captain Ormsby smoked much more than was good for him, and took constitutional rides and walks with praiseworthy regularity, while Mrs Ormsby beguiled the time with art needlework, and longed hourly for the comforts of her own home.

That they had no children of their own had been for years an acute sorrow to this excellent pair, and when Ralph Ormsby's French wife died, they had written the kindest letter to the bereaved husband, and had offered to be responsible for the welfare and happiness of his motherless child.

Family ties had never been the most attractive form of bondage to this careless younger son, and so he accepted the offer of his brother and sister-in-law with the frankest alacrity; brought Edith—a small, black-eyed creature, who looked very pale and solemn in her mourning—to Ormsville; left her there with expression of many fine fatherly sentiments, and troubled himself no more about her.

The Ormsbys were the representatives of a


good old family, one that had declined considerably in wealth and prestige, but, through a combination of fortunate circumstances, was steadily working its way backwards to social status and influence.

To fit their niece educationally for any high position, and to hope that good fortune would render the position a superior one, was in keeping with the Ormsby's entire way of life and thought.

At first circumstances seemed to favour all their aspirations. Edith proved to be exceptionally pretty as she grew up, and to be possessed of that indefinable thing which women value more than good looks, namely, good style. She was a fearless and graceful horsewoman in a country that was nothing if not a hunting country; and she was bright and entertaining without any possibility of degenerating into an objectionable clever woman. And when she managed to attract the notice of the wife of the greatest of all the local magnates, Captain and Mrs Ormsby felt joyously that her fortune was made. Lady Deborah called on the Ormsbys, took a fancy to Edith, and the girl was launched.

But, oh, disastrous chance! Set with full sails on a flowing sea, this perverse little craft, instead of allowing herself to be wafted to the Fortunate Isles, preferred to hug the shore, making coquettish visits to dangerous shoals and rocks. In other words, Miss Ormsby preferred amusement to a secure position, and wasted her golden hours in trifling with detriments.

That such a pretty girl would be talked of was only to be expected; but there is notice



that injures as well as notice that elevates, and Miss Ormsby was not particular which she attracted.

This was gall and wormwood to her relatives. To see all that they had striven for and attained carelessly flung away by this thoughtless girl, to hear her familiarly spoken of as Edie Ormsby by men that they did not consider good enough to have a bowing acquaintance with, and to realise that her prospects were a hundred times worse at twenty-five than they had been at eighteen, took all the placid pleasure out of their lives.

Often the uncle and aunt talked over her misdoings as sufferers talk over a dire family disaster; while sweet Mrs Ormsby grew thankful that she had no daughters of her own, since girls were so little to be relied on.

"It is all her French mother. The French are all like that," Captain Ormsby would maintain, with strong insular conviction.

And yet they loved the girl, and were proud of her, with a crushed, down-trodden pride.

They had almost resigned themselves to bear with what they could not alter, and let her work her doom in her own way, when the unexpected happened, as it sometimes does, where people have quite ceased hoping. General Helston, a friend of Lady Deborah's, and as gallant an officer as ever wore a sword, fell in love with Miss Ormsby in a frank, unquestioning way, and asked her for his wife.

General Helston was not very handsome, and he was no longer young; and so though the girl coveted his position, she hesitated. She did not fancy him, she told her aunt as carelessly as though the future might bring many similar

opportunities, and she really could not give him any definite answer immediately.

Then Captain Ormsby did the most desperate action of his life. On a day's notice, he removed his establishment bodily to Inchmaree, where a friend of his had a marine residence that was always at his disposal; there, at any rate, she would be safe from criticism, and beyond the reach of temptation to any vagaries that would make her suitor withdraw his proposal.

The girl thought she was being coerced into an unwilling consent, and laughed to herself good-humouredly. To think of Uncle Charlie and Aunt Ellen, expecting to force her out into anything she did not like, how amusing and simple minded they were! As regarded General Helston, she did not care in the least how the matter ended. He was rich, of course, and his position was unimpeachable, but then he had that dull quality of earnestness. Now if it had only been one of half a dozen of the subs!

At first, Inchmaree was deadly dull, a mere fishing village, with a scant and ignorant population, and not a human being except the priest with any pretence of education. Before a week, she was quite ready to write to General Helston to come and marry her then and there, and save her from going crazy; but that was before she met Father Donovan's protégé; after that the letter was never thought of, for Niall was absolutely delightful, handsome as a picture, and not uncultured, and so wonderfully strong and graceful, with just a suggestion of picturesque barbarism about him. He was as absolutely novel and delightful to her as she to him; and Miss Ormsby set herself to his subjugation with happy, cruel glee.

And to think that she had let that horrid, rude old priest spoil all her amusement! How could she have been such a fool! She should have stopped herself when she thought of her promise. But still a promise was a promise, and having made it, she tried to indemnify herself by sending caricatures of Father Donovan in all her letters, and writing really clever parodies of their interview.

The fourth day of her enforced idleness was an exceptionally gorgeous one. The sky was a cloudless field of turquoise blue, the sea a quivering sheet of azure, and the crisp breezes that came landwards carried with them the life-giving scents of the waves.

"I suppose my promise need not make me a prisoner," she said, discussing the matter confidentially with herself. "At any rate, I am going out, though I be anathema-maranatha for evermore."

She put on her little white sailor hat, and a white pilot cloth jacket over her white serge frock, and as she stood on the hillside amid the heather, she looked most fair, and sweet, and innocent.

"Like an angel," an onlooker said to himself, ardently, while his heart gave a great slow plunge in his breast.

He had been sitting alone among the black jagged teeth of the great rocks that fringed the shore, but at sight of her he rose, straight as a pine, and stood looking beseechingly towards her.

"Come." She made a pretty imperious gesture of invitation, and he came to her side swiftly.

"I have not seen you for days," she said, with an air of discovery.

"No, not for four days." A sudden pallor had crept under the brown tint of his skin, and his lips trembled a little as he answered her.

"I have been so busy, and you—"

"I have been breaking my heart."

"Breaking your heart! Why?" She looked at him with the surprised upward movement of her eyebrows that she had been told was so pretty.

"I thought I must have offended you."

"Offended me! How could you offend me?"

"I did not know."

"I assure you I was not in the least offended, so now you can be happy again."

His face did not brighten, did not even lose its chill pallor.

"Since not seeing you for a few days has made me so miserable, I have kept asking myself how shall I bear it when you have gone out of my life altogether."

"Oh, you will forget; one always forgets sometime."

"I shall never forget. I shall not even try. Does one wish to forget that one has been happy?"

"Only when remembering causes pain; but, no doubt, I shall come back here now and then when worldly people tire me, and then I hope you will like me enough to welcome me."

He did not answer, and she went on. "When I come back, in four or five years perhaps, I shall find you married to some pretty Aileen or Norah. Well, you can talk of me to your wife, and tell her what friends we have been."

His eyes gave an ominous flash at this, but as the lids were lowered she did not see it.

"When you have decided on a sweetheart, will you write and let me know? I shall like to make you a present then, something useful, a fishing boat perhaps, though you must not cease to use the curragh, since it was in that I saw you first."

A sudden rage shot through all his being. For the first time he realised that he was being played with, and tortured intentionally. For an instant he looked up at her with a sullen, sombre glow in his eyes.

"Are you angry with me?" She came forward and laid her pretty hand on the knotted muscles of his arm. "If I have vexed you, I am sorry. I have been very happy in my holiday here, and the pleasure is altogether owing to you. But, of course, it was only holiday-making for both of us, and must end; you will not mind after a time."

"No, I shall not mind." She was insinuating all he would never have dared to say, and she was very cruel.

"I almost wish we could have been better friends," she said, with a light laugh. "Now, if I had been a fisher girl, or if you had been—different."

He drew himself up in a royal sort of way, and the western light fell full on his face.

"If I had been different, who knows if I should have been happier? Not even in my dreams, Miss Ormsby, have I dared to think that we might have been better friends."

Unconsciously her eyes fell before him. As she had said, he was one of Nature's gentlemen, and had the courage of race.

"I am glad of that," she answered in a subdued voice. "Then, you will not mind that I

am to marry General Helston sometime before the winter."

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN ORMSBY had been for a long walk that afternoon. Walking was such a necessary part of the routine of his enforced seclusion that he had come to consider it a bore. But there was no good in letting Ellen know that; she was worried enough already.

His stay here was absolutely necessary, and, therefore, must be borne; but if his evil genius had been at work, it could not have done worse for his personal comfort. Here was not a living soul to exchange ideas with, nor a decent road to ride on, nor a thing to kill, except blue-bottles, and he was so fond of killing something. Now, if it had only been August, with plenty of blackcock and snipe about, he could have been almost happy. But day after day nothing but his cigar and solitude, and all for a little minx who had not an idea of gratitude. Well, he must honestly admit that he had not expected her to be grateful for being brought to Inchmaree, but she would thank him for that afterwards. Both Ellen and he thought she seemed more amenable, and it was but that day that General Helston had written urging for an answer.

At this juncture his long strides brought him within sight of Father Donovan, who was leisurely proceeding in the same direction as he,

and welcoming the idea of hearing the sound of his own voice, he hastened his pace and soon overtook the priest, who received him but surlily.

The good man's temper had not improved since his interview with Miss Ormsby, and he was aware, too late, that his interference had but precipitated matters. Niall had begun to mope and be miserable already, and, in the natural course of events, this would have been postponed till after the young lady's departure from the neighbourhood.

Half a dozen times since that ill-fated afternoon when he had intercepted the pair on the headland, he had been tempted to go to the Lodge and tell his troubles to Captain Ormsby. That that gentleman had not the faintest suspicion of his niece's intercourse with Niall he was absolutely certain, and on his indignation over the discovery he could reckon. But tale-bearing did not appeal to one who was always judge and not witness in parish matters; and since Miss Ormsby had taken his rebuke in good part, and was keeping her promise, he had virtually nothing to reproach her with. Yet he was angry against her and every one of her name, and therefore he received Captain Ormsby's overtures with the scantest courtesy, while that gentleman ascribed his gruffness not to personal dislike, but to imperfect culture.

"You have a remarkably picturesque country about here," the officer said with assertive cheerfulness, as he shortened his steps to keep pace with his companion.

"Yes, it is picturesque, as poor land so often is."

"And the people seem a wonderfully fine,

hardy race. Now, that young man Niall, I do not think I have ever seen a more magnificent human creature."

The captain believed at that moment that he was making himself irresistibly agreeable.

"Humph."

"I have often thought what a soldier he would make."

"I do not approve of war."

"Oh, well no, I suppose not; but sometimes a just cause has to be maintained, and it is well to have fine men on the right side."

"Niall has never thought of military service."

"I daresay not, and no doubt it would be a pity to deprive the village of its chief ornament." Then a sudden curve in the steep path brought the two men to a sight that made Captain Ormsby wish the village had never possessed such an attraction.

On the level terrace below them, where the slope of the hill made a pause before it became merged in the rocks below, Niall and Miss Ormsby were standing, her hand on his arm, her face lifted to his.

There was no mistaking the attitude—it was that of two people who regarded each other with no ordinary interest; and considered as human creatures, and apart from the adventitious distinctions of social position, the connection would not have seemed an unnatural one. This was not, however, the aspect of the case that presented itself to Captain Ormsby as he stood thunderstruck, while a fierce word shaped itself in his throat.

The priest stopped too, and his eyes kindled.

"She has broken her word," he said. Then to the captain, "This has been going on for weeks.

I wished to tell you before, but I had not the courage."

The other's eyes sought his face incredulously.

"A fisherman! A common fisherman!" he said huskily. To steady himself he leant his hand against a boulder that jutted forward into the path, and his breath came heavily, and his face grew blank and miserable. "I could not have believed it," he said after a pause, turning to the priest in his helpless craving for sympathy. "There are certain things that one ranks among the impossible. And she is all we have!"

"And he is all I have!"

"And just now, too, when she had a chance of undoing all her follies and saving herself."

"She will save herself, never fear. This is serious for him, not for her. I thought you would have recognised the difference."

His eyes were fixed gloomily on the pair below, who had parted now, the man going steadily and blindly forward, the girl hesitating and turning, and standing to look after him.

"I shall take her away to-morrow," Captain Ormsby said with sudden fierceness.

"To-morrow, or next week, or next year, what does it matter now, since he has grown to care?"

The captain turned and looked at the priest curiously.

"He seems dear to you," he said.

"Yes, he is dear to me. I have had little else to love for many years."

"Is he a relative?"

"No."

"But he lives with you."

"Yes; he has lived with me since he was a little child."

For the first time, pity for these others took the place of wrath in Captain Ormsby's mind.

"I am very sorry if, through any fault of ours, you are made to suffer," he said.

"Being sorry won't matter, since the thing is done. You see we are not like the people of your world, to whom a heartache is a pang for a day. Here, people have so little to cheer them that they may die of sorrow. I have half a mind to tell him his story, to save him from himself."

"Then he has a story?"

"Yes."

"Might I hear it?" He roused himself through courtesy to semblance of an interest he was far from feeling. "If I can be of service to him, you will find me very willing, for in this thing that has happened I do not hold him at all to blame."

"You could not help him; if anyone could have done so, I should have attempted it years ago. That Niall is some great man's son I am quite certain, though it must always remain impossible of proof."

"How is that?"

"He was the only living thing that was saved off the wreck of an East Indiaman twenty-two years ago. The woman who found him wished to keep him for her own, and denied his existence to all inquirers. Then she came to Inchmaree—to avoid questions, no doubt—and when she was dying she told me the truth, in tardy remorse. But what could I do? She possessed nothing by which the child's identity could be proved. I did not know the name he had borne, knew nothing, in fact, but the name of the vessel."

"And what was that?"

"The *Rajah*."

Captain Ormsby started and looked after Niall's diminishing figure.

"It is a curious coincidence," he said. Then, after a long pause. "I shall certainly mention the matter to Tredegar."

On the evening of the next day the Ormsbys left Inchmaree, the whole of them in remarkably bad temper. Mrs Ormsby felt perfectly overwhelmed, ashamed of Edith, and hopeless of her. Captain Ormsby's mental attitude was a compound of wrath and scorn, while Edith, in a travelling dress that was the very perfection of neatness and daintiness, wore a cold expression on her pretty face, and felt almost angry. To be five-and twenty years of age, yet treated always in this inconsequent way, as though she were a naughty child, was too absurd. Carried here and carried there at a moment's notice, and scolded and wept over; only that she had the temper of an angel, she would not stand it. As to their remarks about her kindness to Niall, she treated them with the contempt they deserved. She wondered what Niall would think of her going off like this without a word to him; but possibly he would conclude that their interview yesterday meant farewell. She hated to seem rude, and never did so willingly, and her uncle and aunt were responsible in this as in many other cases. She had often warned them not to drive her to extremes, and they never minded her. Well, she would marry General Helston at once, just to escape from them; and if the marriage turned out an unhappy one, she was perfectly sure she was not to blame.

The hired waggonette, with three sulky people inside and a delighted maid on the box, was

driven away from the pretentious, chill, unhomely house; while Niall out at sea in the curragh, with the sculls lying idly at his feet, and his sad, stern face supported between his hands, was trying to find a reason for his own misery, and failing, as people always do, until the pain is over.

Winter had come round again at Inchmaree; the fishing boats were secured in a place of safety; the fitful out-of-door activity of the summer was quite over; most of the seafaring men were trying to turn their hands to odd and unaccustomed household jobs, while the women were knitting and stitching their hardest to eke out the common livelihood.

It was a somewhat stormy day, the wind came up in great billows from the ocean, carrying light scuds of foam with it, and salt flavours were abundant in every breath it gave. Yet, for all that, the atmosphere was not cold—bracing and sweet rather, for all its bluster.

Father Donovan was writing by a little table in front of the study window, making copious notes from a volume he was reading. The priest was very fond of reading, and managed to get hold of new books now and then, even in this remote spot. Of course he only read the volumes that supported his views of theology or politics, not being anxious to distress himself needlessly.

On the window panes in front of him the dry salt borne up from the sea had formed itself into minute crystals, and he was absently admiring the shapes of singular grace they had taken, when the unexpected sound of wheels startled him, and, looking out, he saw that a hired fly had stopped at his door.

He pushed back his chair with a sense of perturbation; visitors were so rare here, in the winter time particularly, that he had grown rather to dread them as harbingers of misfortune.

The door bell rang sharply and imperiously, bringing out the maid-servant in a state of flurry; he heard himself inquired for, and then the door of the plainly furnished little study was opened and the stranger entered.

He was a tall man, already a good deal past middle life, but with the erect bearing and quick eye of a soldier.

"Colonel Tredegar, at your service, sir," he said. "My friend, Captain Ormsby, told me to come and see you."

"Indeed!" The priest seemed to freeze all over, as he always did at the name of Ormsby.

"You have a young man living with you, of whom they have spoken to me." He had seated himself at the priest's invitation, and now he flung back the sleeve of his long cloak, and leant his arm heavily on the table beside him.

"What of him?" with an ominous darkening of the face.

"I understand he was saved from the wreck of the *Rajah*.

"He was."

"My wife and child sailed from Calcutta in the *Rajah* on her last voyage. I have reason to think this young man may be my son."

His voice was tremulous, and he wiped the dew from off his face as he spoke.

Father Donovan did not answer. He could

not say that he felt surprised at the moment, he seemed to have expected this always, and to have been preparing for it.

"My son, if alive, is four-and-twenty now. He was little more than an infant when I was ordered home from India; there was not time for his mother and him to accompany me, they followed me in the *Rajah*."

"The child was the only living thing that survived the wreck, but there were other children on board. How can you tell that this is yours? There was nothing on his person by which he could be identified, and he has no recollection of anything that preceded his arrival here."

"Let me see him. If he is mine, I think I shall recognise him."

The priest hesitated. Whatever was best for Niall was what he desired above all things, but—

"I understand you have treated him very kindly. If he is my son, you will not find me ungrateful," Colonel Tredegar said, with his intonation of natural superiority.

"I have done the best that I could for him, under the circumstances; but you know he has been brought up in quite a simple way, not as an officer's son should be, and I am half afraid he is not what you expect."

"Why?" sharply.

"Oh, I mean just what I say. If ever there was a white soul in a beautiful body, Niall has it; but, then, don't you see he is just a fisherman—and a Catholic, and you are not of his faith."

"Since we worship the same God, does the way in which we worship him matter? As to his

simple life, if he is a Tredegar, it has not harmed him. Can I see him?"

The priest approached the door, but on the threshold he paused. "It will be better not to let him know anything till after you have talked with him," he said; then he went into another room and wept bitterly.

When he was left alone, Colonel Tredegar paced the little study in great agitation. After all these years, was the son of his youth to be given back to him, the child of that fair-haired woman who had been the one love of his life? He had a vision of bare baby arms, a sweet laughing mouth, and beautiful dark eyes looking out of a cherubic countenance. But the child was a man now, and untaught and coarsened by homely toil. His heart contracted. In that case, would he not be happier here, where fate had cast him, than in the great world where refinement can be cold at times, and courtesy cruel? What Father Donovan had suggested was wise, he would tell the young man nothing till he had talked with him.

But when the door opened and Niall entered, no way daunted, carrying himself like a prince and wearing his fisher's dress as though it had been a royal robe, Colonel Tredegar forgot his caution.

"You are my son," he said, and burst into tears.

"It is quite the sensation of the season," pretty little Mrs Helston said to her dear friend Lady Jane Pomfret, "and being one of the things that can never be decided beyond question, the interest will always continue.

You know, everyone asks is he really Colonel Tredegar's son, though no one can ever positively assert that he is. Oh, they are alike, certainly, and the young man is quite charming, so simple and sincere, a gentleman by nature, you know, and so remarkably handsome. As to educational deficiency, that is all rubbish; he knows a great deal more of what men talk of than they do, earned his bread by the fashionable amusements for years, and is so delightfully unsophisticated that he has not the least suspicion that he is a lion."

"You are enthusiastic," Lady Jane said with soft surprise. "Shall I tell General Helston?"

"Not if you expect to interest him. He lets me amuse myself, which shows his good judgment. As to Niall—"

"Do you mean Mr Tredegar?"

"Yes—his father calls him Eric; but I shall always call him Niall—I believe he absolutely detests me. He does everything but cut me when we meet, bows in the chilliest way, and looks unutterably bored if I compel him to talk to me. Oh! I think it mean, when he has such lovely horses and such a splendid yacht, and could amuse me so perfectly."

"But is he not rather odd—a philanthropist, or something of that kind?" Lady Jane asked in her languid voice.

"Oh, I don't think so. He is said to spend a couple of months annually at Inchmaree, where he was brought up, and to give a fourth of his income to the old priest there for charitable purposes; but that is all. And to think that but for me he would have been a rustic there yet! I went to the place and found him, and restored him to his father, and yet he will

scarcely speak to me. It just shows that gratitude is as extinct as the Irish elk." And Mrs Helston closed her fan with a vicious little snap, gave her hand to an adoring and beardless youth in evening dress, and was whirled down the West End ballroom to the music of "Sweethearts," while a white-haired old general, whose dancing days were long over, looked after her wistfully.

IN SUMMER WEATHER

AN omnibus half-full of people was trotting leisurely in the Bayswater direction from Oxford Street, its occupants engaged variously in reflection, study of the early editions of the evening papers, or observation of the panorama outside.

Suddenly a young woman at the top of the omnibus cried "Stop!" and signalled impatiently with her umbrella. She had just observed her proximity to her own particular street, and felt indignant that the conductor had forgotten her injunction to put her down there.

"Stoppin' in a minute, miss," the conductor explained politely.

Now, Jane Woods objected to euphemisms, and had a will of her own. She meant to alight at a certain corner, and no mere 'busman should prevent her. She gathered her hand-bag and paper parcel together, grasped her umbrella resolutely, and strode down the centre of the vehicle, which had not slackened its pace. Eyeing the conductor with indignation, she pushed past him and alighted on the street. It was not a dignified descent; but for the sustaining hand of a man who happened to be passing at the moment, she would have fallen. The

incident discomposed her, and she stared at her preserver with a bewildered expression on her good-humoured face.

"Ladies should never leave a moving conveyance; they have not the usage of it," the man observed amiably.

The girl's brow cleared, and a look of pleased recognition came into her eyes.

"I am as sure as I can be that you are from my own part of the world," she said. "They don't speak like us everywhere."

"I am from Nutford."

"Didn't I know it? And I'm a Grimpat woman."

"Are you?" He wanted to be polite, but obviously he was not greatly interested.

"It is five years since I have seen anyone from home," she went on, with wistful eagerness. "I wonder now if you are likely to know any of my friends!"

"What may their names be?"

"I have friends called Mason, others of the names of Birney, and there are Smiths—"

"I know some Smiths," he said, smiling.

"Of Grimpat?"

"No, of London."

"They would not be the same," she said, with a little sigh. "Have you lived long hereabouts?"

"Three years."

"I have lived eight in the same place."

"And never been home?"

"Once."

"Why don't you go back if you are homesick?"

"It's a long way, and it is not as easy to go back as to think about going."

"Well, I am glad you were not hurt," he said, preparing to move on.

"And I am glad I met you." She extended her hand half involuntarily. "Good-bye, and thank you."

"Good-bye." He shook hands with her and went away, moving quickly as if to make up for lost time.


"He might have told me his name," she said, with a little frown, and then she proceeded towards her destination, his voice still in her ears, his brown eyes, that had a certain knowledge and sympathy in them, looking into hers.

He was younger than she, not more than five-and-twenty apparently, and he was well-grown and good-looking, with a certain breath of country winds in his cheeks.

As the girl went homeward, in a direction opposite to that he had taken, she was wondering what his occupation was, and to what family he belonged, and was even asking herself would it be impossible to find out who in Nutford had a son in London.

Everything about Jane Woods—accent, aspect, attire—indicated her position in the lowest rank of the middle class, or the better rank of working women; her dress of brown cashmere, her black jacket and velvet-trimmed bonnet were essentially sober and respectable, while strict attention had been bestowed on the suppression of the natural ripples in her blonde hair. Her eyes were light blue, of the shade of forget-me-nots, her face was short, serene, and sensible, and her strong colour gave her a look of health and rusticity.

Jane Woods called herself a dressmaker, when she wanted to impress the community; she did



her shopping in that capacity with an eye to business discount, and in the literal sense the appellation was correct. She was private dress-maker to the three Misses Spencer, lived at their house, boarded at their expense, altered and made their bonnets, mantles and gowns, but rendered them no other service in return for the annual sum they paid her. It gratified them to think that the excellent Woods had as much to profit at the year's end, between wages and presents, as if she worked for the public and had a house of her own, and helps and apprentices; while Jane's boast was that her ladies were the best-dressed women in the whole of Bayswater, though not one of them spent more than fifty pounds per annum on her entire wardrobe. Indeed, the harmony in an establishment inhabited solely by persons of the weaker sex was so great that the Misses Spencer devoutly hoped that the three treasures who dwelt in the kitchen region, and the faithful Woods who inhabited the second floor, would form, with themselves, a united household until the great disturber of material enjoyment—Death—should come to summon them in turn to a circle of more unbroken peace.

It was a pretty, prim, old-maidenly hall into which Woods admitted herself with Miss Selina's latch-key, borrowed for the occasion. There was a softly tinted paper on the wall, and rich rugs over the Chinese matting that covered the floor, and the blue jar on the table near the window was full of hyacinths that scented the air with odours of spring.

"Is it you, Woods?" Miss Selina asked through the open drawing-room door.

"Yes, miss."

"You are later than usual."

"Half an hour later, miss. I had a few extra things to do, and I spent a little time studying a bonnet in one of the windows of Regent Street that looked likely to suit Miss Sarah; and then I nearly had an accident coming home."

"An accident! dear me! how was that?" Miss Selina came out of the drawing-room, a pretty, faded figure with hair growing grey, and little faintly etched lines on forehead and lips. Her dark crimson gown gave her a certain glow of life and colour, recognised as wholly fictitious when she spoke in the gentle tones of one long used to placid experiences and simple sources of happiness.

"The man would not stop the 'bus, and I got out when it was moving—"

"And fell?" Miss Selina cried, in accents of unaffected dismay.

"No, a passing gentleman caught me. And just think, Miss Selina, he was from Grimpat!"

"Why, it was quite an adventure!" the little lady said, with pleased interest.

"It did me so much good to hear the old accents. Eh, dear, there is no place like home, and no people like old neighbours when one is lonely."

"I did not know you were lonely, Woods," Miss Selina said, with some concern.

"Did you not, miss?" the girl asked bluntly. "Well, if you sat, year in year out, in a room by yourself, making other people's clothes all day long, maybe you would find it out."

"Dear me! I am very sorry. I am sure I never suspected it. You know, if you prefer to sit in the servants' hall in the evenings—"

"Do you think I should call cook and Sibella company?" Jane asked, with a disdainful toss of her chin. "The fashion plates and the sewing machine for choice any day."

"Miss Sarah or Miss Susan would sit with you now and then," Miss Selina went on, hesitatingly.

"No, thank you, miss. I'm not complaining, I'm sure; never have done so, and don't mean to begin it. I'm happy enough; only now and then a thought of old times comes back and puts it into my head for a minute that I should just like one lark among my own sort of people."

"A lark, Woods!" Miss Selina said, in consternation.

The girl laughed. She had sound, white teeth, with an infinitesimal space between each, and her mouth had a pleasant wholesomeness about it.

"Oh, just for a minute, same as one wants the kingdom come when one is in a bad temper. I shall be all right when I have had my tea." Then she proceeded to speak of her purchases, saying she had brought the small articles in her bag, and the larger parcels would be sent next day.

"You have got pretty things, I have no doubt," Miss Selina said, with interest.

"Oh, trust me for that—and discount on them, every one." She gave a little self-satisfied nod, and went down the hall, taking her bag and umbrella with her.

Her workroom was a spacious and beautifully clean apartment, that would have seemed bare but for the warmth that filled it. The tile-patterned linoleum on the floor had rather a chilly look; but the red moreen curtains in the

windows, the red cushions in the rocking and basket chairs, and the red-fringed cloth that covered the cutting-out table when it was not in use, looked eminently comfortable and old-fashioned.

A fire was blazing merrily on the hearth, and the workroom cat was sleeping peacefully on the rug, close to which a square table with a solitary tea service stood ready. A bright kettle waited in the fender the hand that should place it on the fire, and a long toasting fork hung beside the mantelpiece.

The girl cut several slices of bread from the loaf on the table, for she had a healthy appetite; but as she turned them on the fork before the fire she sighed,—

“If Grimpat people could see me, they would think me luckier than a duchess. And so I am,” she said firmly. Then she sighed again. She was thinking of a young man in a grey overcoat who had spoken with the accents of home.

After tea had been finished and cleared away, Jane got out her needlework. Though a day's shopping for her employers was an important part of her duties, she could never rid herself of the thought that the time had been spent in idleness, and therefore she worked longer than usual each evening on her return. The Miss Spencers held, with justice, that Woods was an invaluable, conscientious creature.

That evening, with home in her thoughts, it seemed a coincidence that a letter came to her thence by the late mail. It was from her Aunt Bess, to whom she sent a little dole now and then, and who wrote to her more frequently when the doles were tardy.

The letter treated chiefly of the writer's in-

firmities at the first; but towards the end it gave a little local news.

"Mrs Hurlburt has got back into the school again, now that Miss Dewar is married, and is going round drinking tea with all the folks that have children. We like to see her, because she is talkative and makes a stir about the place, though she is not the sort of a lady the other is. There is nothing but marriages going. The Frazers' Eliza will be married next week, and a fine match, too. That's the third of her ugly lot Mrs Frazer has got off her hands, and every one of them younger than you. What about your marrying, Jane, dear? Surely there are men enough in that big London, and few girls to beat you anywhere! I don't say that marriage is the very best luck for everybody; but there is always a chance in it, and, when it turns out right, there's few things to beat it."

Jane read the letter twice, then she folded it slowly and put it into the drawer of the sewing machine. That showed she was abstracted. She never secreted personal things there when she had her wits about her.

As the days grew longer, and bird notes thrilled the air even about Bayswater, and the front gardens of the villa residences hung out yellow festoons of laburnum and fragrant bouquets of lilac flowers, Jane Woods, sitting over summer fabrics in the big bare workroom on the second floor, would lift her head and hold her needle poised, often for ten minutes at a time, while she stared out through the window at the pale blue sky and the rags of silver cloud drifting lazily athwart it. She was thinking of Grimpat—of the doors standing hospitably open throughout the summer

season; of the roses trained over the house fronts, the bits of tailor's trimmings which held them to the walls, looking like some kind of queer irregular blooms before the leaves come out and cover them; of the caged larks exulting in the freedom of the open air, through which they would never cleave their way again. It was of the place she was thinking, not of the brother married there, or the aunt who thought well of her when she manifested a liberal spirit, or of the sister gone to America, and prospering financially in that wealthy land.

With the busy season Jane grew listless. The Misses Spencer were going to Eastbourne for August and September, and, as they liked to look fashionable in a fashionable place, there were several gowns to make for each, with accompaniments of dust cloaks, and beach hats, and silken underskirts. The making of a series of other people's dresses, when one's heart is not altogether in the work, becomes fatiguing in hot July weather. It was in vain that Miss Sarah got a tonic from the family chemist for the invaluable Woods, and that Miss Selina obliged her to take a constitutional walk daily; her forget-me-not eyes did not recover their lustre, nor had her firm cheeks their former healthy bloom.

"Let us take Woods with us to Eastbourne," Miss Selina, the kindly, suggested to her sisters. But Miss Susan, who was the frugal member of the family, reminded her that they were going to a hotel where every meal was charged in the bill.

"It would be better to present her with five pounds and let her travel home," the second sister recommended.

They felt sure that this suggestion would delight Woods. But, when it was made, she declined it. Two months was too long—her friends at home would be tired of her; but if she might stop in the house for six weeks of the holiday time, she would be glad of the last fortnight to visit in.

The first day of her freedom the girl spent in absolute idleness; not even putting away her mistresses' dresses or tidying the workroom, but sitting by the open window, inhaling the hot vapours from the street, and thinking of remote green pastures.

On the second and third days she roused herself, and was portentously busy. The fourth day she made purchases in a shop in Westbourne Grove of a number of dainty things—satin squares, and lace, and soft cashmeres to be embroidered in washing silks. On the fifth day she took a 'bus after breakfast and went Hyde Park-wards, and, sitting in a shady seat, she worked all the forenoon at some dainty trifle of lace and ribbon for herself.

She dined at a restaurant in Sloane Street, choosing a seat close to the entrance and scrutinising the face of every man who came or went. As she returned home in the evening she sat by the door of the 'bus, and again she observed every face near her.

For a fortnight things went on thus; then Jane came home one evening with a look of her early contentment on her face. She had seen the Nutford man, and he had said, "How do you do?"

Meanwhile, her needlework assiduities were provoking comment in the kitchen. The housemaid had gone home, but the parlour-maid and

the cook remained, and they decided that Miss Woods was quite as busy as when the ladies were in town, and that the things she was sewing at were just as lovely as if intended for her employers.

"She is making a white cashmere dressing-jacket, with rosebuds streaming down the front, and what she calls a cascade of lace trimming it; and she has made a satin bed-satchet and comb-bag, and a lot of little dressing-table mats," said Crackenthorpe, the parlour-maid.

"Wedding presents for some of her friends, likely," Cook answered.

"I'll take up her supper early and ask her," said the parlour-maid.

But the little oddments were cleared away when supper-time arrived, and Woods was putting the final touches to a new gown of fawn cloth, with filagree buttons and a pink brocade vest, that lay spread out on the couch by the window.

"My! what a beauty!" said the parlour-maid, whose tray had glided noiselessly past the work-room door.

Jane threw the sleeve of the bodice hastily over the pink vest, then, as if ashamed of the impulse, drew it back again, and said soberly,—

"I am glad you like it."

"Is it for Miss Selina?"

The parlour-maid deposited her tray on the table, and drew near, gazing at the filagree buttons with eyes full of adoration.

"No; it is for me."

"For you? Why, it is grand enough to be married in!"

"That is just what it is for."

"And so you are going to be married? Well,

I declare! Cook will be surprised, and the ladies, too, I'm sure. But it is good to think of one break in this colony of old maids. I'm just as glad as glad on your account. When is it to be?"

"Oh, not till October, or maybe November."

"Then, isn't the wedding dress a little bit soon?"

"No; it's face-cloth, and will do for any season; and then, you see, this is the only time that I'm likely to have all to myself for sewing."

"And what is he?"

"He's from my own place."

"Yes; but what is he?"

"He's a plumber and house-decorator."

There was a little hesitation in the answer, which did not escape the questioner.

"A journeyman?"

"Oh, dear, no!—on his own account."

"Here, in London?"

"Yes—at Brixton."

"And well-to-do, I make no doubt? Plumbers make a fortune when they know their business and are steady."

"He's in a very comfortable way," said Jane, sedately.

"And how did you meet him?"

"He's from my own place. I thought I told you that."

"Bring him here till we see him," said the parlour-maid, coaxingly. Anybody's sweetheart in the house will be a comfort to the whole of us."

"He's very busy, and he lives a long way off."

"Yes; but he could come of a Sunday."

"I don't know that he would when the ladies are from home; he wouldn't think it right."

"They would not object, and you know that," the parlour-maid answered, with a little accent of pique.

"He's pretty shy, anyway; but I'll see what I can do. I should like you to make his acquaintance," said Jane, with a suspicion of patronage.

As the parlour-maid went downstairs, she stopped before a mirror on the landing to adjust her fringe. It comforted her to see that she was a great deal better looking than Jane Woods.

When she was left alone, Jane sat down to her supper, but she ate with less appetite than usual. Her cheeks had a deep tinge of colour, and her nostrils quivered a little, as if she were under some excitement.

"I'll have the fun of it," she said resolutely. "And—who knows?"

When supper was over, she tried on her new gown. It was complete even to the lace at the wrists, and it fitted her perfectly. The pink vest suited her, and she saw that it did. She lighted the candles on both sides of the cheval glass at which her mistresses were wont to consider themselves in new garments; then she walked up and down in front of it, holding her hands in different positions, and turning her neck this way and that to observe in what attitude she looked to most advantage. Then she extinguished the lights, and went back to her easy-chair, where she sat for a long time, abstractedly stroking on her knee the stuff of her new gown.

During the following days she was very busy,

and once she took the parlour-maid shopping with her, and once she took cook, treating each to a liberal lunch on the occasion. Every day she wrote a letter, and went out to post it, in view of which correspondence it struck Crackenthorpe as odd that she seldom received a letter in reply.

She had written to her aunt some time before, "I am thinking of what you said about marriage, and I think there are worse things, when one can get the right man. Maybe I'll be a bride sooner than you expect. I have the chance just now."

Cook and Sibella, who had now taken Crackenthorpe's place, decided that nothing could be more liberal than the outfit to which Miss Woods was treating herself—no less than five new gowns, and wraps and jackets to correspond, and underclothing in abundance. All this was very interesting, but their curiosity relative to the man had become absolute pain. They had never seen him, and, with the run of the house at their disposal now in holiday-time, such reserve on his part was wholly needless.

During this exciting period Jane wrote twice to Miss Selina, but she made no mention of her matrimonial prospects.

In the last weeks of September she went home, taking a trunk of considerable dimensions with her, in which the kitchen company suspected she had packed more of her trousseau than it was altogether lucky to wear before the wedding. And their surmise was quite correct, for on her first Sunday at Grimpat, Jane blossomed into her wedding gown and a bonnet of gold tinsel and brown sequins, and a little white

veil, behind which her rosy face acquired the touch of refinement, which was all it needed to make it pretty.

But Jane was disappointed with Grimpat. The place was less progressive than she had imagined, and the married women were more commonplace, and the girls less good-looking. The men, too, were a little uncouth. The news of her engagement put them on easier terms with her than they would otherwise have been, and the compliments they paid her were not of the delicate kind she could have appreciated. As a matter of fact, she had two offers of marriage while at home—in itself a flattering circumstance; but though possibly seriously intended, if taken seriously, they were made jocularly with a “throw-him-over-and-take-me” free and easiness that did not commend itself to the girl from London.

But the better bred recognised that Miss Woods wished to be treated with dignity; the women admonished the facetious males, and at the last they made her wedding presents, that reconciled her to them, though many of the gifts were so inelegant that she burned them privately on her return to Bayswater.

One curious circumstance was that she told no one that her lover hailed from Nutford, nor had the name she gave him a local sound.

On their return, the Misses Spencer found Jane improved in appearance, and quite happy in her prospects—so happy that they forbore to reproach her when she gave them a month’s notice. They knew quite well they could never again have a private dressmaker as skilful and as capable; but they were reasonable enough to know that their convenience could not be

expected to weigh in view of their sewing-woman's happiness.

Miss Sarah, who was the sentimental one of the family, though she looked so strong minded, came to the workroom one evening to hear all the *pros* and *cons* of Jane's experience.

"Does the thought of the change in your life not make you a little melancholy?" Miss Sarah asked wistfully.

"Not a bit," said Jane, stoutly. "When a woman has had to fend for herself as long as I have done, she wants to be taken care of."

"I suppose you are very much in love?" the lady said gently.

"There is nothing I would change in him from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot," was the ardent answer.

"You might bring him to see us."

"He wouldn't come, miss; I've asked him to a dozen times."

"Then we must go to see him when you are married. He won't be shy then."

Jane admitted that he probably would not.

Then Miss Sarah asked to see the lover's photograph, and Jane promised that he should get one taken at an early date.

The little ladies were much interested in useful wedding presents for their faithful Abigail. They bought her very pretty dinner and tea services, and teaspoons, and table linen, and a number of practical odds and ends, which, when ranged in the workroom, with presents from her fellow-servants and various persons of her acquaintance, made a collection that many a middle-class bride would have envied.

"It is good to be you," cook said wistfully;

whereat Jane shed a slow tear or two, and answered that it was not always wise to judge by appearances.

"Do you not think well of the young man?" cook asked, with concern, whereupon Jane briskly wiped her eyes, and answered that there was not the like of him in London.

The Misses Spencer wished to give the wedding breakfast, but the bride gratefully declined the proposal. She said Mr Suttlethwaite wanted to be married from the house of a cousin of his own, and that everything was arranged.

"Then we'll go to the church and see you despatched," Miss Selina said, smiling, and to that proposal Jane was quite agreeable; but when the name of the church was asked for, the curious circumstance was that the bride had forgotten it.

"I dare say he is a monster, and she does not want us to see him," Miss Susan said to her sisters in confidence. "If that is the case, what a foolish girl she is! It is a poor thing marrying a man one is ashamed of!"

But when Jane showed her lover's photograph this supposition was no longer tenable, the man was so handsome, so well dressed, so like a gentleman, that the eyes of the three little ladies had something like envy in them as they offered their compliments and congratulations.

"That man shy! Nobody could believe it! You really must bring him to see us," Miss Sarah said.

"I've coaxed and coaxed him," Jane answered; "but he's that self-willed you wouldn't believe it."

"Well, I am sure we wish you well, Woods,"

Miss Selina said, with a sigh. "We shall miss you greatly; but if it is for your happiness, we have no right to complain. If you love each other, that is the most important point."

"I am sorry I am going away," Jane answered huskily. "If it was all to begin over again I wouldn't think of it."

"Oh, you only imagine that now that the end is near," Miss Selina answered.

And then Jane suddenly burst into stormy tears.

The little ladies said she was overwrought, and they withdrew and left her to get a rest; and cook sent her up a cup of beef tea, as if she had been an invalid, and while she drank it the tears dropped steadily over her round cheeks. By-and-by they ceased, but her heavy-lidded eyes wore their sad aspect all the evening.

She had a great deal of packing to do, for she was to leave next day; and as she looked now and then at the walls of the dismantled bedroom, which she had occupied for eight years, she said half aloud several times,—

"It is so desolate."

She went away after early dinner the following afternoon, a cab taking her boxes to the nearest railway station.

When she was at the cab door, having said "Good-bye," she ran back hastily, and tumultuously embraced the servants, and again wrung the hands of the three Miss Spencers. Then she drew down her veil, descended the steps a second time, and drove away without a backward look.

From that moment Jane Woods was never heard of in Bayswater. No notice of the marriage appeared in any newspaper. When

Miss Spencer went to inquire several weeks after Jane's departure, at the address she had given at Brixton as that of her future home, she found that the house had been occupied by a family of the name of Pearce for four years, also that there was no plumber of the name of Suttlethwaite in the local directory. The photograph which she had shown them, and which they had so greatly admired, was, they learned afterwards, that of a well-known young politician, and had been purchased on the premises of the Stereoscopic Company.

When Miss Susan Spencer, the practical, and Miss Sarah Spencer, the sentimental, talk the mystery over, they conclude that the whole love affair was the invention of an active brain that had grown tired of "gusset and seam and band," and was wearying for one experience in the region of romance. They think that a chance encounter with an interesting man was the necessary spark to an accumulated pile of tinder, and that Jane, the sensible, made up the whole love story and had all the sensation that was possible with an entirely mythical lover. In their hearts they do not think the freak unpardonable, now that time has taken the first edge off their surprise and indignation, and in view of her usefulness, they think they would forgive her if she came back and confessed and asked to be reinstated; but when they discuss the matter with each other, they know she will never do this. She was the least imaginative of women, as they thought; but she acted her romance with consistency akin to genius. They wonder sometimes where she is living and what she is doing, and if she is posing as spinster or widow, and they con-

tinue to deplore the accidental encounter with an entire stranger which turned the sensible head of the practical Woods. The incident made a prolonged impression on the little ladies, and when they speak of it together, their ultimate conclusion always is that one never knows the mind and heart and possibilities of anybody.

JOHN CONWAY'S NARRATIVE

"PROFESSOR MOORE is old Moore," I said, making the remark more to myself than my auditor. There are heights of astonishment, as of pleasure or pain, on which words fail us, and we return to the simple propositions of primitive man.

"Is he indeed?" Kitty answered, sedately, continuing to button her long gloves, preparatory to a saunter with me.

"He is scarcely changed at all; he has the same red head, the same uncertain gate, the same cordial way of addressing one, and the same blushes."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Kitty said, looking at me with the frank disdain she had manifested now and then since that luckless summer day when I told her I loved her.

I had always read and heard that girls were touched by the offer of a heart, and grateful even where they declined it. But Kitty was frankly indignant, and there was no pretence in it. She called me an absurd person, said she needed me in the capacity of a cousin and not at all in the capacity of a lover, and if I was going to spoil our intercourse by such horrid sug-

gestions there was an end of everything. When I admitted ruefully, after a time, that I had not been, perhaps, altogether in earnest, she said she knew that, patted me on the shoulder, agreed that we might be friends again, and brightened up like an April day. But our subsequent relations were not as pleasant as before. I admired Kitty's judgment less than I had done, while, curiously enough, she seemed to doubt mine also, but for the very opposite reason.

Old Moore, who is to lecture to-night, was at school with me at St Oswyth's. The masters thought him a dunce, the boys thought him a fool; among us he had not a very good time," I explained. "Now the press and the public say he is one of the greatest living naturalists, and our Society is paying twenty-five guineas to hear what he has to say to-night."

"I have no doubt you behaved like brutes to him, and now he is ahead of the whole of you," Kitty said, with her chin in the air.

"When I met him, and he told me that he was Professor Moore, he could have knocked me down with a feather."

"And so have paid off old scores," Kitty interjected pertly.

"No; I never struck old Moore. I was not mean enough for that. He said to-day he has nothing but pleasant memories connected with St Oswyth's, though, looking back on it, I think we treated him badly."

"You may tell me about it," Kitty said condescendingly, as we descended from her home into the street.

"He was called 'old' Moore, because there was a junior of the same name in the school, no relative, and quite a different class of fellow. Old

Moore was my age, and should have been in my form, but somehow he was always behind with his work, though he often laboured like a nigger. But what he knew he could not tell, unexpected questions bewildered him, and often, when he was supposed to be listening and taking notes, he was really working out problems of his own, and drawing all kinds of outlandish things in his note-books. As you may suppose, he was caned more than enough, and when, after the canings—not at the time—he would have dreadful fits of crying, and he such a big fellow, we got into the way of thinking him a Miss Nancy. The little world of school is just like the big world, Kitty; set a misapprehension afoot and ten men on horseback could not arrest it.”

“I prefer you to narrate without philosophising,” Kitty said.

“Live things were his hobby, and it took all his pocket-money to bribe the housemaids not to tell what he kept in his bedroom. But at times the smells led to an investigation, the headmaster would overhaul the apartment in person, old Moore would be caned again, the housemaid reprimanded, and all the pets would be thrown over the playground wall or restored to their natural habitat. For a week old Moore would go about like a distressed ghost, then he would begin to brighten again; probably he was taming a little grey mouse, or investigating the family secrets of a beetle with his pocket microscope. There never was a gentler or more harmless creature, and that makes it look rather dastardly when I recall what a butt we made of him. I remember the day we sent him up the big elm tree in the playground. Someone had thrown up a tuft of grass, which had caught

in the fork of a thin branch, and as old Moore was rather near sighted, we persuaded him that it was the nest of a golden-crested wren, and he went up to investigate. But the bough broke, and he fell some twenty feet. Dear Kitty, that was a dreadful moment for many of us. He struck the earth with a thud like a bundle of wet linen, and then lay absolutely still, his long arms and legs perfectly inert, and only his white eyeballs showing in his upturned eyes. By-and-by one hand began to twitch, and after a little he moved and sat up, whereat our relief was so great that several of us burst into a roar of nervous laughter. But old Moore had to keep his room for a fortnight, and it was in connection with that that the chief incident of my story of St Oswyth's took place.

"There was some talk of having a present ready for old Moore when he was able to be about again, as a kind of tacit apology for what had befallen him; so it was quite on the line of our sentiments when Dixon, major, said he would take him some tuck out of his home box. Now, eating was never a weakness of Moore's, but it was of Dixon's, so we thought his proposal generous.

"There are some things too mean to think about; when Dixon came down sniggering to say he had filled one of his mince pies with a powerful drug, and had left old Moore eating it, I think several of us felt like madmen. I don't often strike fellows, but I knocked Dixon down, and then flew upstairs for my life. The black-guardly pie was on the table at old Moore's elbow; not caring for sweets, he had put it down when Dixon left the room. I snatched it up and threw it out of the window, and when I

told Moore what had happened, there he was blubbering again, where another fellow would have been wild. Now, as good or ill luck would have it, the master's pug was passing as the pie flew into the playground, and the luckless brute ate it, and died next day in great agony. Of course that brought the whole murder out, and Dixon was expelled. When old Moore heard of the fracas, he came down to the master's room, with his dressing-gown flapping about his thin legs, and begged his hardest that Dixon should be forgiven, but the headmaster was inexorable. You see, the pug was a pedigree dog, and that did not lead to the melting mood, so he solemnly expelled Dixon in presence of the whole school for what he called the most cowardly outrage he had ever heard of. Everybody was silent and wretched, and when the cab drove off with Dixon and his boxes, old Moore fainted as limp as a herring, and then he had a relapse and an attack of something like low fever, just as if it had been his fault."

"And what became of Dixon?" Kitty asked in a low voice. She had taken my arm when I narrated the pie incident, and there was something almost affectionate in her face as she looked up at me.

"I have a kind of idea he went to the dogs. When I last heard of him he was in Africa, had joined the Cape Mounted Police or something."

"And Professor Moore is old Moore," Kitty said softly, quoting the very words I had used earlier.

It was just lecture time now, and as we passed up the aisle of the lecture hall, old

Moore stepped, amid applause, on to the platform. While I had been speaking of him I had grown enthusiastic, and therefore his appearance, familiar as it was, gave me something of a shock. There was a blackboard for demonstration drawn up behind him, and as he stood in front of it, bowing his acknowledgments, I felt the old impatience with him for looking such a fool.

His subject that evening was the stickleback, he said, and as he hesitatingly advanced this proposition a slight titter ran through the hall. I glanced at Kitty apologetically, and she looked back at me wrathfully; but whether the wrath was with me, old Moore, or his irreverent auditors, I was quite unable to tell.

Then the lecturer plunged into his subject—the history, habits, looks and emotions of the stickleback—and as he spoke the little fish grew from the coloured chalks in his hands on to the blackboard before us; planned, worked, wooed, fought, lived, an intelligent creature beneath our eyes, while the lecturer's figure grew erect, his blue eyes under their light lashes flashed like sapphires, and a steady colour, as delicate as a girl's, burned in his face.

Kitty leaned towards me. "He is beautiful," she said.

We spent half an hour with the stickleback, and then the lecturer moved on to other marine creatures, and broke down the barrier between them and us, and showed us how all created things are bound together by the chains of emotion as well as of life. Everyone seemed to sigh involuntarily as old Moore ended; it was as though he had kept us dreaming, and

we awoke and came back to common things with a start.

"You are to introduce him to me," Kitty said imperiously as we rose.

So we waited till the audience had drifted away, and then I presented old Moore. But the glow had died out of him; he was shy and embarrassed, and accepted Kitty's compliments awkwardly.

He had engaged a room at the hotel, but we persuaded him to sup with us at Kitty's father's, that we might hear all his adventures since we parted.

His adventures were quite simple, he said, and all his success was due to his hobby. It taught him everything—taught him Latin, because all scientific names were in Latin; and Latin made other languages easy, and no doubt that was why he took a fairly good degree. Then he went south, and saw a little life at the equator.

"Crocodiles?" I suggested; and old Moore answered that there was a great deal of humanity in a crocodile when you made its intimate acquaintance.

On his return to England he published two books. Such simple books, old Moore said, in mild astonishment; but they took, and when he applied for the vacant Chair of science at — University he got it. There were far better men among the candidates, old Moore assured us, but he seemed always in luck; whereat Kitty and I looked at each other and smiled.

I was to see him off by train next morning, but half an hour before train time a waiter from the hotel delivered me a note. Old Moore

had caught a very bad cold, and would defer his journey till the afternoon. But it proved to be worse than a cold on investigation. The professor had been knocking about here and there and everywhere, lecturing wherever asked, sleeping in damp beds, never thinking of precautions, and now he was downright ill.

"Is there anyone you would like to have with you?" I asked, when this fact had been borne in on us both; and old Moore looked at me with a certain piteousness.

"I have not one soul belonging to me in the wide world," he said; "not one person to be sorry if I die, or glad if I recover. I never had anyone since I remember but a guardian, and he died five years ago."

When I told Kitty this, she sent her mother down to ask the doctor if it was possible to remove Mr Moore, and the doctor said Yes, with care. So old Moore was taken in an invalid carriage to Uncle George's—and we thought the journey had killed him. He was delirious that night, and for a week he raved about nothing but St Oswyth's, and the memories, as he recalled them, stabbed me to the heart. "I have tried, sir, indeed I have tried; must I be flogged for the misfortune of being stupid?" he would say; whereat Aunt Agnes wept softly and copiously.

It was the most tedious convalescence any of us ever knew, and only for the fear of giving more trouble I doubt if he would have got better at all.

"I am half in love with death," he said once, and that seemed to explain everything.

"That is because you are out of its clutches," Aunt Agnes rejoined, smiling.

"No, not altogether. When I believed I was dying I felt nothing but a supreme curiosity, and a great regret that I should not be able to convey to any of you my first impressions of the new existence."

Aunt Agnes smiled uncomfortably. "I do not think I have ever known anyone quite like you," she said.

Old Moore's face clouded over. "I have not had much chance of being like other people," he said. "Do you know that, until I came here, I never in my whole life formed part of any household? I was farmed out till I was old enough to go to school. From school I went to an old bachelor guardian for the holidays, when I was left to my own devices exclusively. From the university I wandered about, a detached unit, till I got my Chair, and became a fixture among other units."

"You must marry and form a little circle of your own," Aunt Agnes said placidly, whereat old Moore shook his red head and sighed.

But he got better in spite of himself, and left us, and for months there came presents from him for Aunt Agnes, presents that had a curious pathos about them. It was as if he was striving to discover what gift would most please a lady. First there was a shawlpin, then a bearskin rug for the hall, then a case of rare butterflies, then a set of *remarque* etchings, lastly his own books in white vellum. "The dear young man!" Aunt Agnes would say with emotion, and would straightway write and tell him his gift was the very thing she had been desiring in vain for years.

It was rather a sad and sentimental time with us after he left, and as the winter came round I

ventured to renew my suit to Kitty, who this time did not look as if she wanted to box my ears. On the contrary, she said all the orthodox things, and said them very gently. She was grateful to me, but what I desired could never, never be. She was sorry I cared for her, and yet not altogether sorry either, since even an unrequited affection had some happiness in it, provided it was a true affection. I should always be her friend, always, but nothing more; marriage was not for her, she had said farewell to all thought of it.

Kitty's former No had made me angry, this one made me feel broken-hearted. It was as if there were two Kittys, or rather as if the old, saucy, naughty Kitty had lent her likeness to a grave woman with a tender heart. What had made the difference? Suddenly the answer flashed out, as if written in fire on the wall—old Moore!

If Kitty had loved anyone else it would have hurt me horribly, but old Moore was like nobody else; one could no more be jealous of him than of a spirit or a cloud. I smiled in a miserable kind of a way as I found myself thinking, with dull heartbeats, of Kitty as old Moore's wife. A professor, a dull, fusty old bookworm, but only thirty-two after all. And then the terrible pathos of his own words came back to me, "In all my life I have never been loved by anyone; I have never been necessary to anyone."

Of course old Moore loved Kitty, that was quite clear when I came to think of it; that he would never venture to say so if left to himself was equally clear. I could bring them together if I liked.

But a man does not hasten to immolate him-

self that two other people may be happy. I took four weeks to nerve myself for a visit to old Moore, and then I dropped into his chambers one day when the rooks were cawing their welcome to the spring, and the clouds were high and far away in the pale sky.

The professor was out, the servant said, but he would probably be back soon, if I could wait.

It was a pretty, cosy apartment into which I was shown, obviously a bachelor's room, yet not devoid of taste, richly coloured and orderly. Two rooms opened off it, one his dining-room and museum. I wandered about aimlessly, looking at the dead things in glazed cases that opened and shut like drawers, till suddenly from one there flashed up at me the winsome face of Cousin Kitty. It was old Moore's own work—a pastel head from memory. I closed the drawer guiltily, and sat down by the fire.

By-and-by he came in—old Moore that never could grow old, that would always have a boy's slim figure and the bright tints of a girl; that would always blush with pleasure, and blush with embarrassment, and become transfigured in the society of those he cared for.

In time the talk drifted to the past summer, to Aunt Agnes, to Uncle George, to Kitty last of all, and then it struck me that the time for speech had come.

"I have loved Kitty for twenty years," I said.

Old Moore grew of a blue-white colour, then he drew a long, slow breath, and said in a low voice, "You deserve her if any man could do so."

"She has refused me twice, and at long intervals; she never cared for me."

"That is because she does not know you," he said, with the patient gentleness of a woman.

"I believe she loves someone else."

He gave a slight shiver.

"Would you mind trying to find that out for me?" I asked.

He rose and went to the window, and stood a long time looking out; and then he said, without turning, "Could you not find out for yourself?"

"I don't want to renew the subject if there is no hope for me."

"Would she not think it an intrusion on my part?"

"Not at all. They all think so highly of you, and then you have known me so long."

It did not strike him that Cousin Kitty had known me considerably longer.

"Very well." He came back slowly, and he did not look at me as he spoke. "You were always such a friend of mine that I ought to serve you if I can." At that moment I loved him; had I not loved him I never could have persisted.

Three nights afterwards I was at Uncle George's, and Kitty was singing to me in the drawing-room, while her parents dozed contentedly over the dining-room fire, and I sat in the shadow of the window curtain, thinking. Suddenly the door opened, and Professor Moore was announced. Kitty rose, a tall, slim figure in her white draperies. The room was illumined by the firelight only, and in the warm glow she looked wondrously fair. Old Moore came forward and took her hand without speaking, and in the silence I seemed to hear their hearts beat.

"It seems so long since you went away," Kitty faltered. "Are you quite well now?"

"Yes, quite well."

"It is good of you to come back to see us?"

He gave a sound like a suppressed groan, poor old Moore!

"I have come on business, to see you alone." He drew away from her, and looked at her appealingly, while her eyes were fixed on him expectantly.

"There is a man who loves you, but he fears—he fears you care for someone else," he said in a low voice.

"No, there is no one else," Kitty answered; and if the songs of angels are sweeter than her voice was then, they will be good to hear.

"He fears he is not worthy of you, but I have said he is worthy, if anyone could be."

"Yes, he is worthy," Kitty said, but a curious accent of doubt was creeping into her words.

"Then I may tell him that you care a little?"

She raised her eyes. "Tell him," she said, and her voice was like a bell—"tell him that his love is such an honour that the thought of it will make all the future glorious; tell him that a woman loves but once in a lifetime as I love him, and some women, alas! never. Tell him," and the tears were running down her proud, uplifted face, "that I loved him before I ever saw him—"

I could not stand it any longer, and I stepped out into the room.

"It is no good, old boy," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder. "You have done gallantly, but I am not in all Kitty's thoughts, so leave me out of your reckoning, and go it on your own account."

Kitty said I was the meanest of men, and she

never would forgive me, but as she kissed me that evening for the first time in her life, I hardly took the remark seriously. As to the professor, since there is a Moore junior, I suppose he is really old Moore now.

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